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THIS MONTH AT EMPIRE

IT'S BEEN 42 years since George Lucas delighted us with a little space movie called *Star Wars: Episode IV – A New Hope*. It was the start of a massive cultural event that changed Hollywood and had a huge impact on modern popular culture. And it all ends right now in 2019 with *Episode IX*.

How do you end *Star Wars*? How do you wrap up something so enormous and meaningful to generations of people? In this issue we talk to J.J. Abrams and his entire crew about the challenge and joy such a huge task presents. In the following feature we go even deeper with J.J. Abrams and screenwriter Chris Terrio about what it means to finish the trilogy of trilogies and be handed the keys to the galaxy.

We're not meant to talk about *Fight Club*, but 20 years after its release (yep, it's been that long) David Fincher's masterpiece speaks to us more than ever. We catch up with David as he shares tales from the set and a heap of behind-the-scenes photos that he's never shared with anyone. And, starting on page 86, he answers a bunch of your questions about everything from if he may direct a Bond film to his huge aversion to iPhones. We are Jack's barely contained excitement.

Elsewhere in the mag we look into the deranged world of *The Lighthouse*, the amazing mind of Taiki Waititi and Greta Gerwig's interview with the four stars of *Little Women*. And, for those who love all things Keanu – we rank our top ten Keanu Reeves movies.

Enjoy the issue.



JAMES COONEY
EDITOR



CLASSIC LINES OF THE MONTH

"I remember fondly going to work to make something we knew people were gonna take issue with."
p.88

"Seeing the behaviour of grown-ups made me realise that no-one ever really grows up."
p.67

"Look, did I ever cry in my hotel room with a bottle of bourbon? Of course."
p.63

EMPIRE

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DID YOU FORGET?

Dear *Empire*, I enjoyed your 2020 preview issue. But I have a bone to pick – how could you not mention *Blade Runner* anywhere in the entire issue? The film was set in November 2019 for chrissakes! Huge missed opportunity by you guys.

PHIL, SUBIACO, WA

You're right, Phil, an absolute shocker on our part. We were too wrapped up in NEXT YEAR to think about what was happening right now.

RIGHT IN THE ED!

What an intriguing insight Ed Norton's editorial was in the previous issue. An inside look into the creative process of a man at the top of his game is a unique experience and I would love more of this type of article. One penned by Harmony Korine would be my dream choice – make it happen, *Empire*!

CHARLES, BATHURST, NSW

Glad you dug it. We will see what we can do to make this happen.

A YEAR TO REMEMBER

Hi *Empire* team, cheers for the great mag and what we have to look forward to in 2020 – seems like a pretty good year of cinema to me! Just wondering what you guys think the best year of releases ever was? Mine is 1998 with *The Big Lebowski*, *The Thin Red Line*, *Saving Private Ryan* and *Blade*.

SAM, MANDURAH, WA

We all have different opinions, but there's a good argument that 1999 was one of the best. Some of the releases that year were: The Matrix, Fight Club, American Beauty, The Sixth Sense, Magnolia, The Blair Witch Project *and* Run Lola Run.

WALLPAPER, PLEASE

Wow, I just finished the latest issue of *Empire* and realised the year is almost over. I think 2019 was a great year of movies. My favourite was *Joker* followed by *The Irishman*. I'm hoping your next issue will contain a few posters to help me decorate the garage. Love the mag and keep up the good work.

SHAUN, VIA EMAIL

Thank you, Shaun. And yes, we've got you covered with posters in this issue.

LETTER OF THE MONTH



YOU COULD SAY I'M A FAN

After 10 years of reading your mag, I thought I'd share a photo of just some of my collection with you. Each one has delivered hours of interesting reading to me and my older brother (who often takes an issue from the coffee table to work and never returns them). Thanks for developing my love for all things movie related. I've loved the issues this year and hope you produce many more!

IAN S., PENRITH, NSW

Thanks for the support, Ian. We've loved putting them together.

WHEELY GOOD FUN

I took my dad to see *Ford v Ferrari* last week. We're not usually into the same films, but I gotta say we both loved this one. I haven't shared an experience like that with him in years. I hope it gets an Oscar.

JULIAN, VIA EMAIL

We think the film is terrific, too. Very entertaining.



Writers this month receive a copy of *Once Upon A Time In Hollywood* out on DVD, Blu-ray and 4K UltraHD December 11.

SPINE QUOTE HONOUR ROLE

SPINE QUOTE #222

"Show's over for tonight. Preview of coming attractions..."

THE CONNECTION

From *Rear Window* referring to our 2020 preview issue

THE WINNERS

Congratulations, Ed Smith. You've scored yourself an *Empire* cap!

Send answers to empire@bauer-media.com.au



PREVIEW

THIS MONTH'S FILM MOMENTS THAT MATTER [EDITED BY JOHN NUGENT]

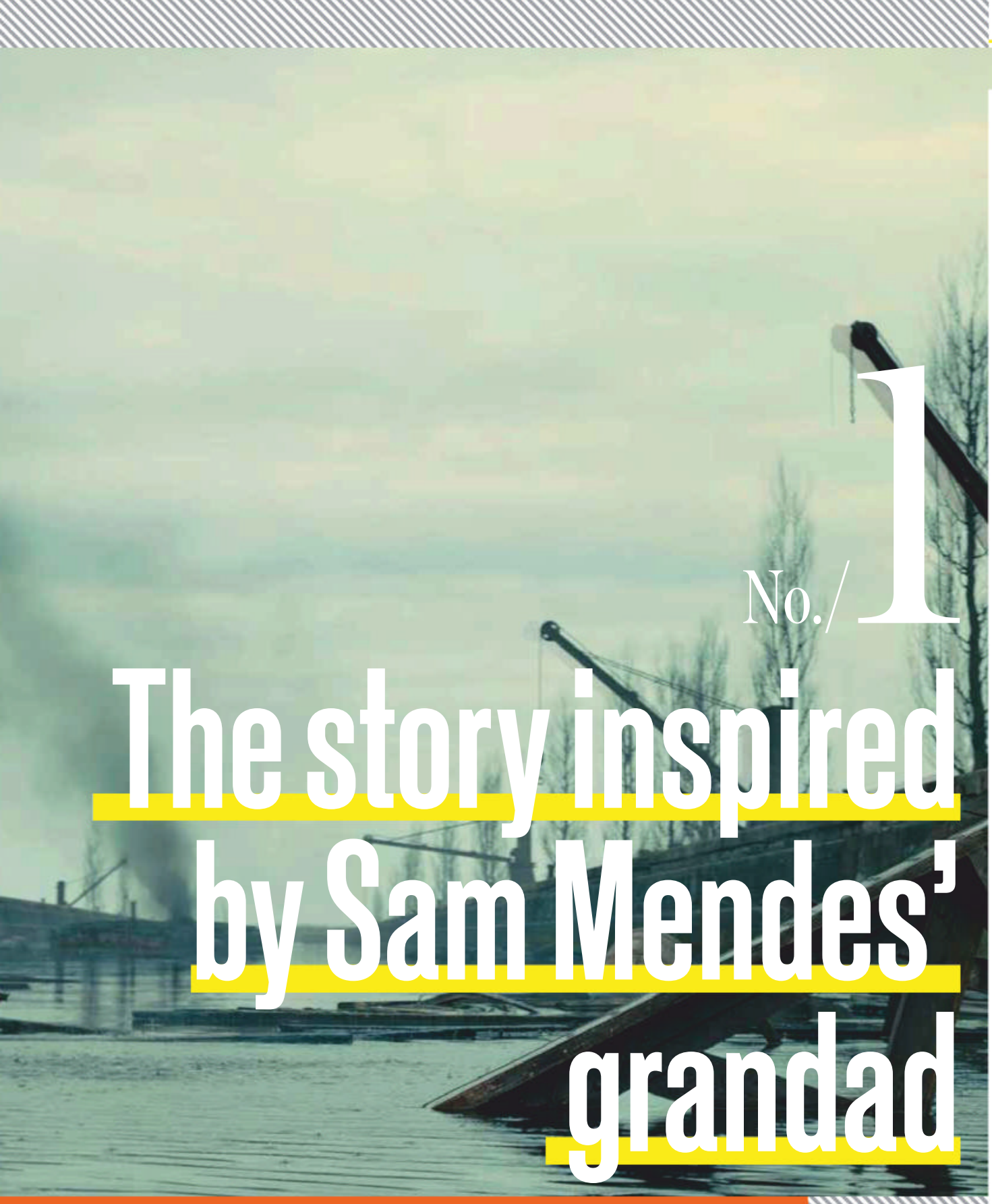






Clockwise from top: Schofield (George MacKay) braves the killing fields of Northern France to warn of an enemy ambush in *1917*; The privates must venture deep into enemy territory; Mackay with Dean-Charles Chapman, who plays Blake; Director Sam Mendes on set.





No./1

The story inspired by Sam Mendes' grandad



Why the 007 director went back to World War I to write his first screenplay – *1917*

IF YOU KNOW anything about Sam Mendes' *1917*, you'll know that it's a World War I drama told in real time in a one-take deal. What you might not realise is that after seven films as a director, *1917* marks the very first time Mendes has written a screenplay.

"Being in the writers' room for so long with two Bond movies [*Skyfall* and *Spectre*] made me more confident about my ability to write something from scratch," he begins. "At a certain point, I felt, 'Why am I sitting around waiting to find something I want to direct. Why don't I just make the thing myself from scratch?"

There were other reasons that forced Mendes to boot up his laptop. The seeds of the screenplay came from his listening to the stories of his grandfather Alfred, a World War I veteran who served from 1916 to 1918. "He won two medals and was gassed, sent home and sent back out again to the front," Mendes recalls. He not only wanted to preserve the personal nature of the story; writing was also a way into realising his audacious vision.

"Because the content and style of the movie went hand in hand from the very beginning — I was always certain it was one shot from the moment I conceived it — I found the process of writing it helped me make it. The whole thing was always a single idea rather than something that was grafted on later."

After two months writing and researching, Mendes produced a treatment and then ran aground. "Putting together the story structure wasn't difficult, but when I sat down and wrote page one, I was suddenly very interested in what was outside the window. Why is that, I wonder?" To stem his procrastination, Mendes brought in Krysty Wilson-Cairns, a staff writer on the Mendes-produced TV show *Penny Dreadful*. From that point, *1917* found life.

"She was incredibly important to the process," says Mendes. "Without having someone else who I admired in the room with me, I'm not sure I would have ever made it off the screen. It would have just sat as a file on my laptop. 'POTENTIAL FIRST WORLD WAR PROJECT.' Krysty was the person who helped me turn it into a reality."

Mendes and Wilson-Cairns (who also co-wrote Edgar Wright's upcoming *Last Night In Soho*) conjured a screenplay about two privates, Schofield (George MacKay) and Blake (Dean-Charles Chapman), who must deliver a message to the British, deep in enemy territory, warning of a German ambush that will endanger the lives of 1,600 men. As such, Mendes sees *1917* as transcending the war milieu into other genres.

"It's in no way a history lesson nor is it a conventional war movie," he says. "It adheres, in its form, more to a ticking-clock thriller or a mission movie. You don't have to know anything about the war or its historical background to go on this journey with them." **IAN FREER**

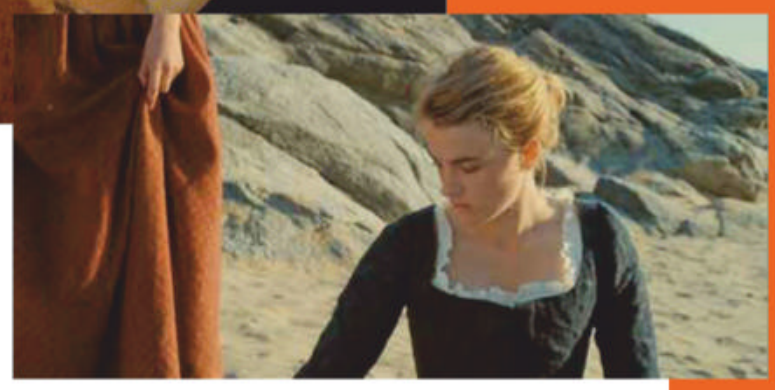
***1917* IS IN CINEMAS FROM 9 JANUARY 2020**

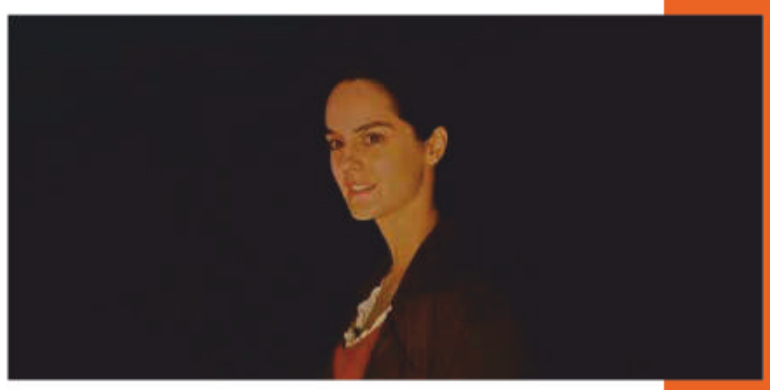


No./2

Telling a love story in looks

Top to bottom: Marianne (Noémie Merlant) and Héloïse (Adèle Haenel) get intimate; Seaside sorrow; Marianne shoots a look.





How new queer drama PORTRAIT OF A LADY ON FIRE created an intense love affair without words

PORTRAIT OF A LADY ON FIRE, director Céline Sciamma's 18th century-set queer romance, which stunned critics at Cannes this year and won both the Queer Palm and Best Screenplay awards, is not a film of many words. Instead, it's a forbidden love story between two women that lives and dies by stolen glances.

"The women's characters in the film are oppressed by the borders that society closes in on them," says Noémie Merlant, who plays Marianne. "But with our eyes, with the looks that we have in secret, there is life and desire."

Set on a desolate island in Brittany, the film charts the lesbian affair between Héloïse (Adèle Haenel), a wealthy young woman headed into an arranged marriage, and Marianne, an artist hired to paint her portrait in secret while posing as her maid. "Because this is a film told through the gaze of others, Héloïse travels from being an object to becoming a subject," says Haenel, before citing a key influence on her performance. "*Carol* is one movie that changed my life," she says of Todd Haynes' acclaimed 2015 queer drama. "Cate Blanchett is very good at changing the quality of her acting throughout the film; at the beginning, with the big fur coat, she's wearing a fantasy, but then it all crumbles."

Sciamma (who also directed *Girlhood,* and penned the Oscar-nominated animation *My Life As A Courgette*) has a particular process for bringing her actors into her world, which, the actors say, is markedly different from other directors. "Céline really takes the time to get this really deep understanding of what you're doing," Merlant explains. "She's sharing a vision with you; it's not forced upon you."

In practical terms, this meant the women would interpret their character's physical mannerisms for themselves. "We tried to create this new emotion for the audience," says Haenel. "I used my imagination and also what I know from Japanese theatre. It's all about the figure. It's all in the face. Everything is very restrained and yet very hectic — there's a cut between your emotions and your intellect." What seems like a technical acting exercise, then, transforms into the most authentic kind of love story. **BETH WEBB**

***PORTRAIT OF A LADY ON FIRE* IS IN CINEMAS FROM 26 DECEMBER 2019**



No./3 Bloodshot

[FIRST LOOK]

Star Vin Diesel gets souped up with nano-technology (plus cars) to play scientifically enhanced superhero *Bloodshot*

AFTER A SOLID decade working in visual effects on *Star Wars* video games and the *Avengers* films, Dave Wilson marks his directorial debut with *Bloodshot*. Vin Diesel plays Ray Garrison, a Marine who is murdered and resurrected and subsequently transformed into a living, breathing killing machine by a team of scientists who inject some nanobots into his bloodstream. It's a rare non-*Fast & Furious* entry for Diesel, who returns to that franchise later next year. But as our exclusive image shows, there will still be cars here. Phew. **ELLA KEMP**

BLOODSHOT IS IN CINEMAS FROM 5 MARCH 2020









No./4 Meet Star Wars' new hope

How director Deborah Chow went from indie/TV gigs to getting the keys to *Star Wars*

DEBORAH CHOW IS suddenly a huge deal. The first female director to take on *Star Wars*, she's helming the upcoming Disney+ Obi-Wan live-action series, plus an episode of *The Mandalorian*. But the filmmaker has been working steadily for over a decade.

THE HIGH COST OF LIVING (2010)

Chow's breakout indie melodrama film doesn't necessarily mark an obvious trajectory towards a *Star Wars* TV show, but it does show her latent and versatile talent as a director. Starring Zach Braff, it won Best Canadian First Feature at the 2011 Toronto Film Festival.

MR. ROBOT (2015)

'EPS1.5_BR4VE-TRAVE1ER.ASF'

Chow's direction on the Rami Malek-starring thriller series compounds a dark twist with the decision to simply let the camera linger with an agonising long take. It's the kind of keen visual sensibility that would make for a fascinating fit with *Star Wars*.



JESSICA JONES (2018)

'AKA GOD BLESS THE HOBO'

Chow truly punctured the season's "13-hour movie" format that hamstrung the Marvel/Netflix shows, choosing to focus on Jessica's court-mandated anger management classes instead. Once more, Chow balanced the human and the fantastic with grace.

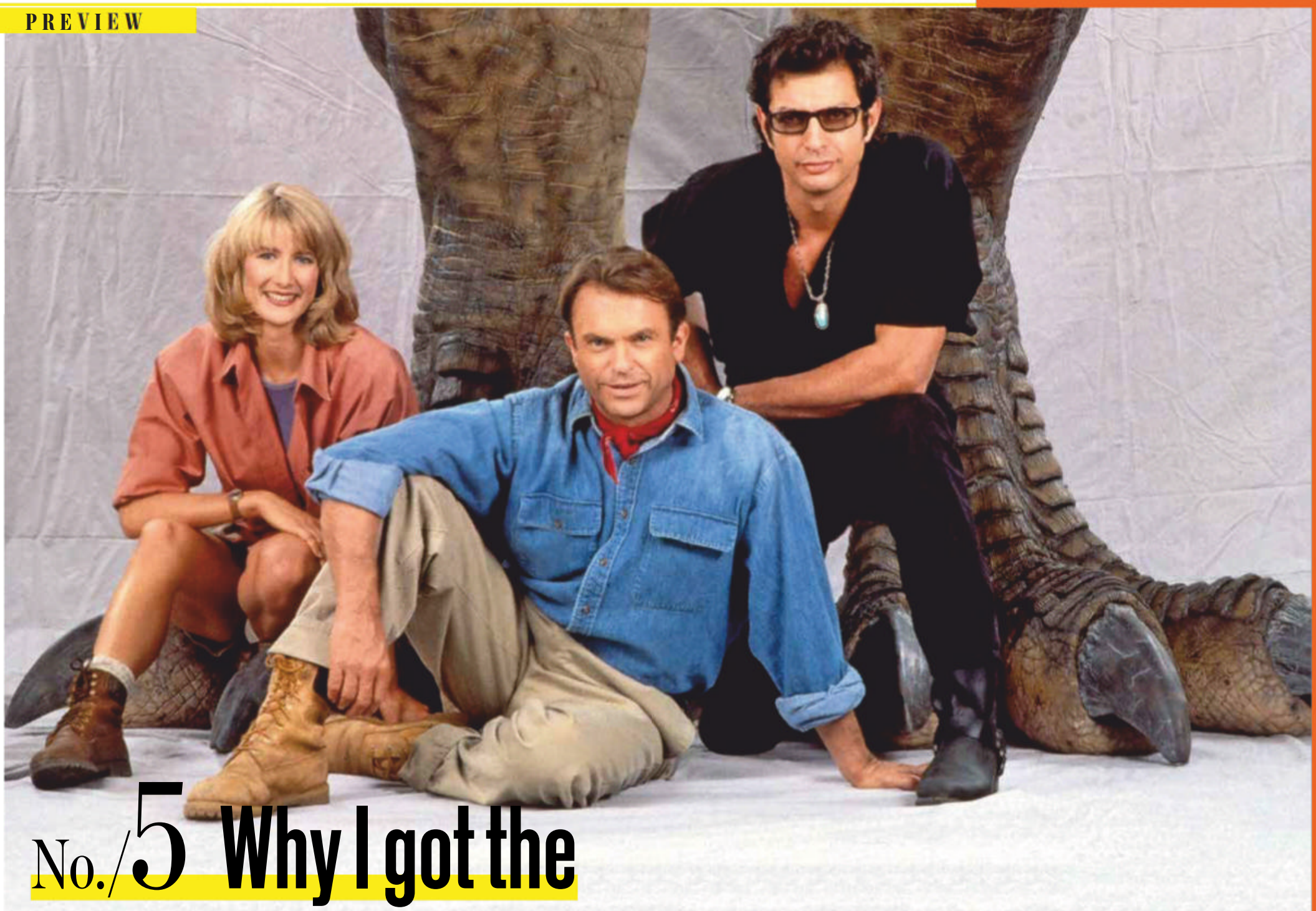
BETTER CALL SAUL (2018)

'SOMETHING STUPID'

Bringing distinctive visual flair to a series already known for it, Chow's De Palma-esque, split-screen cold open in this episode of the *Breaking Bad* spin-off offers a stunning moment that hangs over the hour, showcasing her penchant for haunting visual storytelling. **KAMBOLE CAMPBELL**

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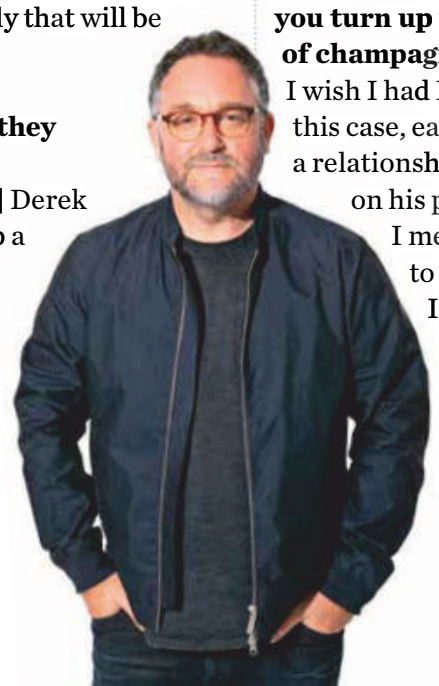


No./5 Why I got the gang back together

Director Colin Trevorrow reveals exclusively to *Empire* the full story behind luring *Jurassic Park* stars Sam Neill, Laura Dern and Jeff Goldblum back for another dino-adventure in *Jurassic World 3*

Why was it important for this trio to come back to *Jurassic*?
I've been really protective of these characters. Some might argue too protective. In the first film, I wanted to focus on creating new heroes. They weren't modelled after Alan Grant [Neill], Ellie Sattler [Dern] or Ian Malcolm [Goldblum]. I wanted them to find their place in the larger story and earn the right to stand alongside the legacy characters. I feel like they've done that now. So when you see Owen Grady [Chris Pratt] alongside Alan Grant, hopefully that will be a bit more meaningful.

How long ago did you know they would be part of the story?
[Regular Trevorrow co-writer] Derek Connolly and I took a road trip a couple of weeks after *Jurassic World* came out. We'd talked about a general arc for a trilogy before then, but we hadn't hunkered down to really map it out. We'd brought back Dr Henry Wu first because he was the man behind the science and the only one who made sense. Otherwise, we'd have had to come up with a reason why Ellie, Malcolm and Grant all went to the theme park on the exact same day it broke down — again. But the next film allows the legacy characters to be a part of the story in an organic way. [*Jurassic World 3* screenwriter] Emily Carmichael and I call it 'Jurassic Park VI', because it is.



How did you get the stars on board? Did you turn up via helicopter with a bottle of champagne, John Hammond style?
I wish I had Hammond's showmanship. In this case, each one was different. I struck up a relationship with Jeff when we were working on his part in *Fallen Kingdom*. Sam and I met by phone, but we'll finally get to hang out this weekend in Spain: I have a feeling there will be red wine involved. Laura and I met when she was at Pinewood for *The Last Jedi*. I was a little awestruck meeting her at first. Someday I'll get past it. Maybe.



Clockwise from top: The gang are back; Jurassic short *Battle At Big Rock*; Director Colin Trevorrow.

How much fun is it to write lines for these characters? How has their dynamic evolved?
The challenge is to make sure they don't feel like caricatures or parodies of themselves. They're so iconic, you can easily fall into that trap. You start by asking the most basic questions: who are these people now? What do they make of the new world they're living in, and how do they feel about being part of its history? Ultimately it will be in collaboration with the actors. They know and love these characters. We'll do it together.

Last time the trio were in a *Jurassic* film, a hurricane destroyed the set. Are you worried?
Well now I am. Thanks, *Empire*.

JURASSIC WORLD 3 IS IN CINEMAS FROM 10 JUNE 2021



INTRODUCING...

Stephen Odubola

TAKES HIS DEBUT LEAD ROLE IN LONDON GANGLAND DRAMA *BLUE STORY*

ON GETTING INTO ACTING

"When I was around 15, I had an assembly in school, and they were talking about career paths. Drama was the subject that really stood out for me. I did my research and went to Identity Drama School for a year. I couldn't continue because my parents couldn't afford it. But I just kept auditioning and auditioning until I got an agent."

ON HIS EARLY ROLE IN *THE LEGEND OF TARZAN*

"It was a very small role, and the first time I was on a professional set. I had a scene with Djimon Hounsou. It was an eye-opener!"

ON WORKING WITH *BLUE STORY* DIRECTOR RAPMAN

"I was inspired by Rapman. I loved that he mixed music with film. He released [popular YouTube video series] *Shiro's Story*, which is how he blew up. It's crazy because around this time last year, I actually emailed Rapman: 'If you ever have any projects, it would be a pleasure working with you.' I didn't get a reply, but I'm not complaining! It's crazy how life works out."

ON WHAT HE'D DO IF HE WASN'T ACTING

"I studied business entrepreneurship and innovation at university, and I've always been interested in property and marketing. So if I wasn't acting, I'd definitely be doing something like that!"

JOHN NUGENT

***BLUE STORY* IS TBC IN CINEMAS IN 2020**

NBC Universal Archive, Will Bremridge; Allstar, Marvel, Shutterstock, Sony; Photographer: David Reiss



BACK TO THE SPIDER-VERSE

A sequel to the Oscar-winning animation was in the works. The beauty of the Spider-Verse is that, by definition, there are infinite possibilities. The witty post-credit sting with Oscar Isaac as Miguel O'Hara, aka Spider-Man 2099, suggests one character who could join Shameik Moore's Miles Morales next time. But is it wrong to hope that he goes tripping through dimensions, and especially the cartoon world of Peter Porker's Spider-Ham?

SPIDER-MAN: HOME-SOMETHING

We now know that Tom Holland will make at least one more Spider-film for Sony, with director Jon Watts returning and a tentative release date set for July 2021. We also know that the end of *Far From Home* left him with a *lot* of issues to work through. Peter Parker has been outed to the world, which creates a major headache — might some Avengers come to his aid? And then there's potential new villains to consider — Kraven the Hunter a distinct possibility.



No./6 The five fates of Spider-Man

Following a suspenseful push and pull between studios, one of our finest young webslingers could be swinging any which way in his near future



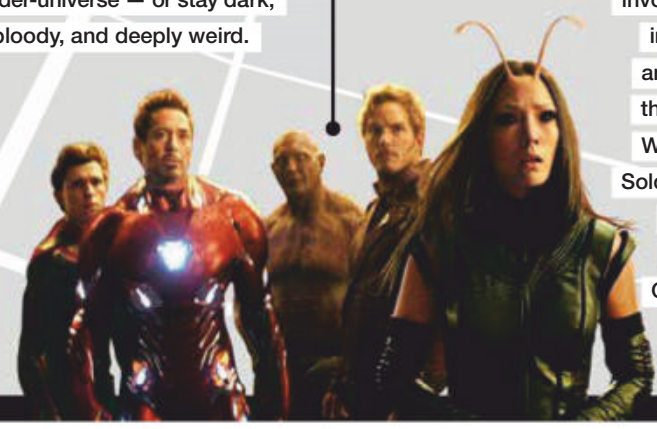
VENOM 2

Andy Serkis' sequel to the 2018 hit will begin filming this year, with Tom Hardy back as Eddie Brock and alter-ego, Michelle Williams returning as Anne Weying (plus reportedly She-Venom), and Woody Harrelson as Carnage, the film's true menace. The big question is whether this *Venom* outing will link to the Tom Holland-led Spider-universe — or stay dark, bloody, and deeply weird.



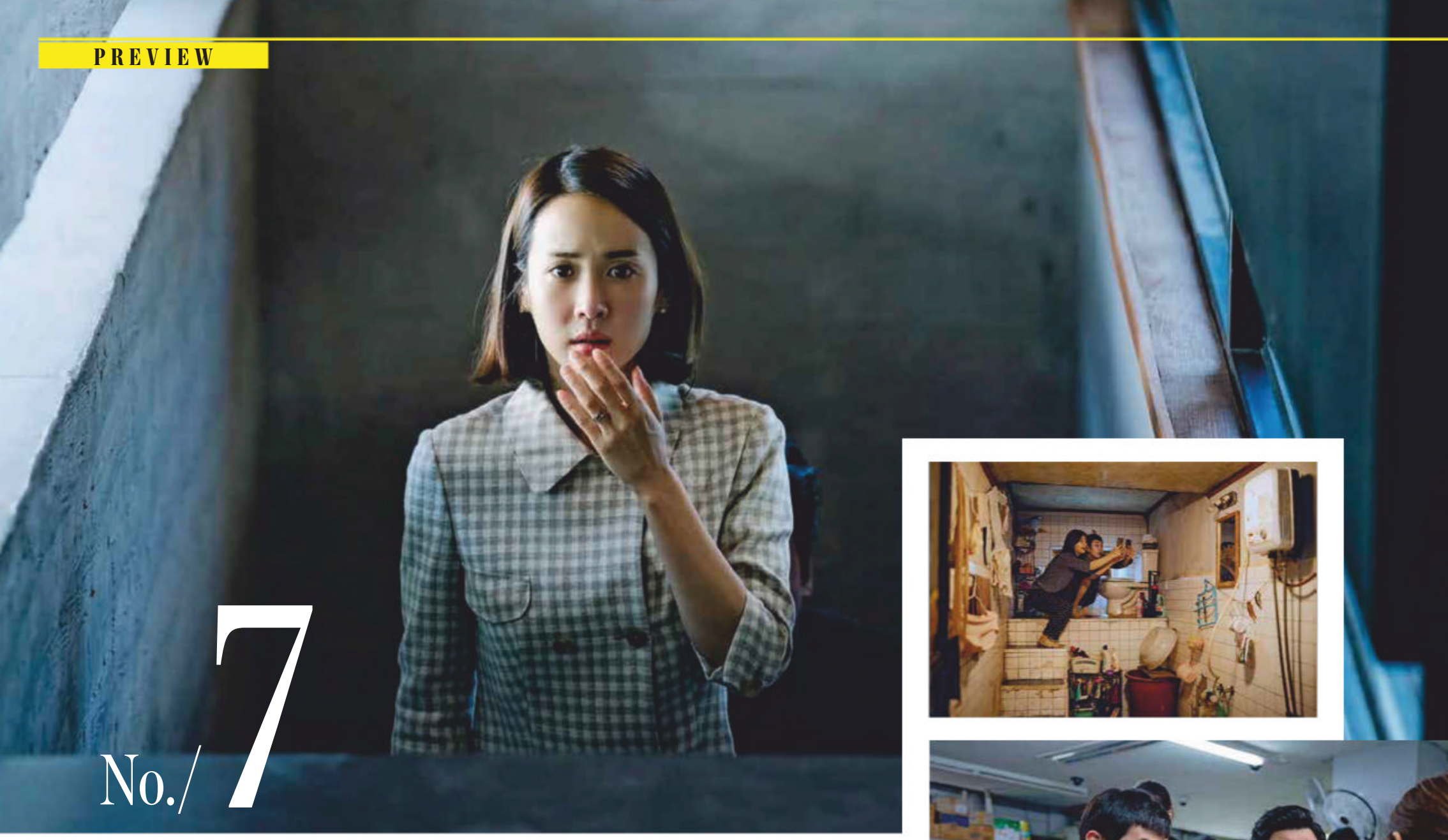
MADAME WEB

Given the Madame Web movie comes from the writers of the Jared Leto-starring *Morbius* film, it's a fair guess that the two could be, ahem, spun together. After all, Cassandra Webb is not your average superhero: an elderly, blind precognitive on a web-like life support system. It's a step forward for differently abled representation, and a heroine like none we've seen before. Let's hear it for super-OAPs.



ANOTHER MARVEL CROSSOVER

Part of the renewed Marvel/Sony pact involves one more event film with Spider-Man in the main MCU. The wording suggests an Avengers-style crossover event. Could there be a Young Avengers team coming? Will he reteam with Falcon and the Winter Soldier? Could there be a huge mutant threat, as the X-Men join the MCU? Or even something bigger still — something Galactus-sized, even... **HELEN O'HARA**



No./ 7

The Korean thriller that tells a universal story

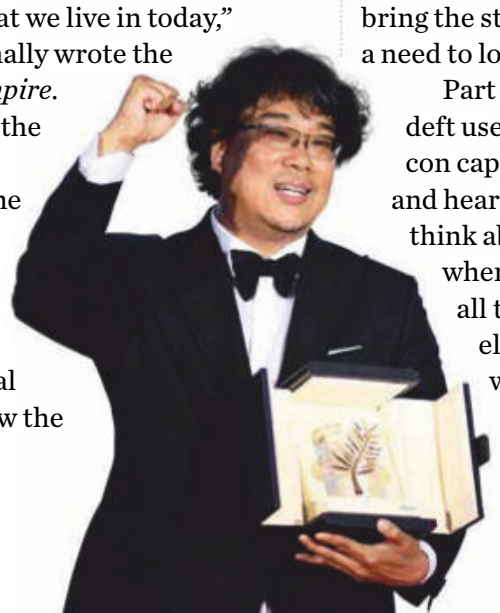
Director Bong Joon-ho's surprising, shocking new film PARASITE is set in his native Korea — but its rich-versus-poor message transcends borders



Clockwise from main: Mrs Park (Cho Yeo-jeong) didn't see the twist coming; How the other half live; Ki-Woo (Choi Woo-shik) and Ki-taek (Song Kang-ho) plot their scheme; Director Bong Joon-ho, with his Palme d'Or.

AFTER NEARLY A decade working in Hollywood with *Snowpiercer* and *Okja*, Bong Joon-ho came back to his native South Korea for *Parasite*, his seventh film. A darkly funny thriller about a poor family who con their way into a rich family's house (with unexpected consequences), its themes are both very Korean and extremely relatable to pretty much anyone. This, Bong says, is deliberate.

"I think this is a very universal story about the era of capitalism that we live in today," the director, who originally wrote the script as a play, tells *Empire*. "There are elements in the film that are specific to Korea — for example, the house the protagonists live in is a very eerie and unique residential structure we have in Korea. But international audiences can grasp how the space works." It may be his first entirely Korean film since 2009's *Mother*, but it's not made solely for Koreans. "I never set a specific target for my audience," he says.



Getty Images

Parasite is by no means a message movie. But among the high-stakes twists and turns lies a serious message about wealth inequality, which feels relevant wherever you're from. "In Cannes, I had reporters from the UK telling me that you could adapt it as a British film — just bring the story as it is. There wouldn't even be a need to localise it."

Part of its crossover appeal, too, is Bong's deft use of genres, flitting between comedic con caper, violent thriller, domestic drama and heartbreaking tragedy. "I never really think about intentionally mixing genres when I create a film," says Bong. "I think all tragedies have certain comedic elements. The opposite holds true as well." And despite the wild stings in the tail, Bong took care to keep things feeling grounded and realistic. "*Parasite* doesn't really feature any villains," he notes. "Of course, the protagonists do bad things, but they just become intertwined in situations that gradually become more complicated. I think that really resembles our actual lives."

The appeal has certainly proved universal so far, with almost entirely positive reviews (99 per cent on Rotten Tomatoes), one of the best per-cinema average box-office results of 2019 in the US, a surprise Palme d'Or win at Cannes — and now serious Oscar buzz, including the Best Picture and Best Director categories. Bong, for his part, is still flummoxed by the Cannes win — "It still feels like something that happened to someone else," he says — and fairly relaxed by Oscar prospects. "The campaign is fascinating," he says. "But I don't consider it my main job." Telling stories that find the universal in the specific, really, is Bong's main job. **JOHN NUGENT**

***PARASITE* IS IN CINEMAS NOW**

No./8 Defying gravity

Assessing the heights (and depths) of this year's most dizzying films. Altitude sickness pills at the ready!

WORDS **JOHN NUGENT** INFOGRAPHIC **COELHO**



AD ASTRA

40,000M ABOVE SEA LEVEL

Brad Pitt put Felix Baumgartner in his place when he tumbled from the 'International Space Antenna' in the Earth's upper atmosphere. He somehow remained conscious — and still looked damn cool.

CAPTAIN MARVEL

12,000M ABOVE SEA LEVEL

Before she jetted off around space with her Kree superpowers, Carol Danvers was a US Air Force fighter pilot, who thought nothing of Mach 1 speeds and mocked gravity. A superhero before and after.

THE AERONAUTS

10,000M ABOVE SEA LEVEL

In the 1860s, scientist James Glaisher broke the altitude world record in a hot air balloon. Eddie Redmayne is playing him in the film. Guaranteed to be in the top five best balloon-based thrillers of 2019.

ABOMINABLE

8,000M ABOVE SEA LEVEL

An adorable kids' film about yetis that doesn't go into the real conditions of the Himalayas: altitude sickness, melting glaciers, 100kph winds and -60°C temperatures. The children need to be told the truth.

SPIES IN DISGUISE

1,800M ABOVE SEA LEVEL

You've seen Will Smith as a cowboy, a fish, a genie — now, finally, you can see him as a pigeon. The former Fresh Prince voices a spy who morphs into a pigeon, which can hit altitudes of 1,800m or more.

HOBBS & SHAW

225M ABOVE SEA LEVEL

Hobbs and Shaw have never seen a skyscraper they didn't want to drive through, blow up or jump off. They choose the latter for London's 'Cheesegrater' — the stage for this year's funniest vertical chase.

GODZILLA: KING OF THE MONSTERS

200M BELOW SEA LEVEL

In the real world, Antarctica is home to a few penguins. In Warner's MonsterVerse, it's home to a dormant Titan, the three-headed Ghidorah. Think we'd prefer the penguins.

UNDERWATER

11,000M BELOW SEA LEVEL

Kristen Stewart heads back to blockbusters with a dip into an aquatic laboratory, which is hit by an earthquake (and maybe more?). At 10,000 metres below where light can penetrate, she has a tough task.



No./ 9

Putting on a billionaire's party (on a budget)

How director Michael Winterbottom staged a megabucks bash in new satire GREED

MICHAEL WINTERBOTTOM IS used to filming Steve Coogan at fancy restaurants, for their TV comedy *The Trip*. But for their new collaboration, satirical drama *Greed*, he had to think a lot bigger. The film is a study of a venal high-street-fashion tycoon who tries to distract from the controversies swirling around him by throwing a massive party on a Greek island. That meant Winterbottom was faced with mounting a convincingly luxurious shindig. "When a retail billionaire throws a party, they spend more on the party than we spent on the whole film," he laughs. Here's how he went about it.

THE THEME

Sir Richard 'Greedy' MacCreadie (Coogan) is not a subtle man. "*The Great Gatsby* meets *Gladiator* meets *The Godfather*" is his vision for the event, leaning heavily towards the middle movie. So he makes guests put on togas, while he decks himself out as a cut-price Commodus. "[Topshop boss] Philip Green had thrown Roman-themed parties in the past, and that subconsciously lodged in my mind," says Winterbottom. "I have a boy and he loves *Gladiator*, so I've sat through it many times. It felt like we could get some mileage from that."

THE ENTERTAINMENT

In the centre of an amphitheatre (hurriedly knocked together by beleaguered Bulgarian builders) is a lion. Named Clarence. "He came from an animal-trainer's private zoo in Oxfordshire," Winterbottom explains. "Steve and I had actually worked with the same lion before — we did a thing about Paul Raymond [*The Look Of Love*], where there was a lion-tamer and naked women in the same circus ring. This time we did a lot of digital. It's harder than working with a real lion!"

THE CELEBRITIES

There are celebrity cameos, with the likes of Stephen Fry and Pixie Lott gracing MacCreadie's revel. Winterbottom admits a few others didn't work out: "To be honest we didn't have the pulling power the real things have." But one of the funniest scenes sees art mirroring life, as MacCreadie, furious that famous guests are dropping out, orders look-alikes to be couriered over. "Those were real fakes, rather than fake fakes," the director chuckles of the guest stars who really play George Michael, Shakira et al for a living. "That idea was our own invention. It would be too depressing it if wasn't."

THE GATECRASHERS

While *Greed* is often funny, Winterbottom is also making serious points — not least about the exploitation of female workers in sweatshops far from the high street. This manifests in Greece in the form of a band of Syrian refugees who turn up on an adjacent beach, enraging MacCreadie. "We were coming up with problems to throw at him, as he tries to make the party a success. And these refugees are invisible in the same way that those women workers are invisible." MacCreadie should have learned from *Gladiator*: even an emperor can be undone by an underdog. **NICK DE SEMLYEN**

***GREED* IS IN CINEMAS FROM 23 APRIL 2020**







Top to bottom: Steve Coogan as super-rich fat cat 'Greedy' MacCreadie; Friends, Romans, countrymen and lookey-likeys; Fireworks hit the Greek island bash; It's only Fatboy Slim!



No./10

[FIRST LOOK]

The Grudge

The horror franchise gets resurrected with Andrea Riseborough under siege

THE LAST TIME we saw an English-language *Grudge* film was 2009, more than 20 MCU films ago. It's not been for lack of trying — a new instalment has been in development since 2011 — but it finally arrives courtesy of Nicolas Pesce, whose debut film, *The Eyes Of My Mother*, convinced producer Sam Raimi that he had the right stuff to go back to the wrong house. Andrea Riseborough leads the cast as a single mother investigating a suburban home that seems to doom all who enter it to death; Demián Bichir, John Cho, Betty Gilpin, Lin Shaye and Jacki Weaver fill out the cast around her. Expect things going bump in the night. And the day. Non-stop, really.

HELEN O'HARA

THE GRUDGE IS IN CINEMAS FROM 30 JANUARY 2020

Clockwise from main: A novel approach to a blocked sink; Andrea Riseborough as the intrepid investigator; Lin Shaye just hates cutting up meat.

[TREND REPORT]

No./11 ADAM DRIVER'S MANY EMOTIONS

From the courtroom to the First Order, one actor is running the gamut this winter

WORDS **ELLA KEMP**

ILLUSTRATIONS **BILL McCONKEY**



CHARLIE

MARRIAGE STORY

There's a lot to Driver's heartbreaking take on a dad in Noah Baumbach's tale of a relationship unravelling. In such a poignant film, his face is a rollercoaster of emotion — from "intense" to "very intense".



DANIEL JONES

THE REPORT

Practicality is key for Driver's sharp-eyed detective in this anti-torture drama. A few jazzy ties throw in some surprises, but in a tough procedural like this, it's the face you need to keep an eye on, ranging between "intense" and "really quite intense".



KYLO REN

STAR WARS: THE RISE OF SKYWALKER

The cape, the scar, the mask: Kylo is a tough cookie. And gives Adam his biggest acting challenge yet: veering between "intense", "slightly intense" and "really bloody intense, actually".



No./12

Guy Ritchie learns to be Guy Ritchie again

[ON-SET REPORT]

With THE GENTLEMEN, the British director is back on home turf. *Empire* bowls up to his gaff for a gander

WHERE? Longcross Studios, Surrey

WHEN? 17 December 2018

WHY? Because after Hollywood hits (*Aladdin*) and misses (*King Arthur*), Guy Ritchie is back making cleverly constructed crime flicks. Formerly known as 'Toff Guys', then 'Bush', Ritchie calls *The Gentlemen* "an interesting sojourn through the highest and lowest echelons of English culture."

WHO'S IN IT? Charlie Hunnam, Matthew McConaughey, Michelle Dockery, Henry Golding, Jeremy Strong, Jason Wong, Colin Farrell — and Hugh Grant who, working against his tabloid-slaying, privacy-crusading image, plays an investigator working for a tabloid newspaper who's digging up dirt on the crims.

WHAT DID WE SEE? Today's workload features some tasty confrontations in a garage run by Ros (Dockery), English wife of American drug lord Mickey Pearson (McConaughey) who grows marijuana under the grounds of country estates. Mickey is looking to offload his business to his number two, Raymond (Hunnam), to spend more time with his missus. The set is filled with shrink-wrapped motors and staffed by all-female mechanics — in a nice touch, the *Pirelli*-esque calendars adorning the workshop walls feature lots of hunky men.

SO IS IT 'LOCK, STOCK AND THREE SMOKING BARRELS'? It's Ritchie back on his beat: a big ensemble cast, complicated plotting, violence, quirky nicknames (Henry Golding is a Triad named Dry Eye), a love of stylised language ("Fuck off back from whence he came") and improvisation. What's different is a calmed-down camera style ("I got bored of chucking it about," says Ritchie) and longer takes. Plus, it's a love story.

BUT DOES IT KICK OFF? Oh yes. We watch with Ritchie, dressed like an English country gent, as a hard-as-nails Dockery faces down Golding's Dry Eye. The scene soon erupts into violence and Ritchie announces, "I need a static shot for the impending claret." That's blood, not Bordeaux wine. **IAN FREER**

***THE GENTLEMEN* IS IN CINEMAS FROM 1 JANUARY 2020**



Alamy, Getty Images









Clockwise from main pic: Matthew McConaughey's Mickey Pearson turns nasty; Fletcher (Hugh Grant) and Raymond (Charlie Hunnam); Michelle Dockery (left) as garage boss Ros; "So you grab his ugly mug like this..." Director Guy Ritchie with McConaughey and Hunnam on set; Cleaning up.

No./13 Dear Kevin Feige...



Empire's Force fanatic James Dyer writes an open letter to the Marvel chief, now moving into the _Star Wars_ world

DEAR KEVIN, I was very excited to hear that, after captaining the good ship Marvel for 23 movies, you're adding a second, Star Destroyer-shaped vessel to your fleet. Now, I know what you're going to say: "It's just one movie, I'm not starting up a whole SWCU." But indulge me for a moment while I tell you why you should.

I love *The Force Awakens* and *The Last Jedi*, both for very different reasons, and I'll likely do backflips over *The Rise Of Skywalker* as well. But no-one can accuse those films of having a singular vision. J.J. Abrams and Rian Johnson were given creative freedom to explore their own stories, which is admirable, but as we ricochet between those storytellers, key plot points emerging, being snatched away and then thrust back to the fore, it's hard not to feel a little disorientated by the narrative whiplash.

What *Star Wars* needs now is what the MCU has showcased so effortlessly: a single, overarching narrative, planned in advance and executed with pinpoint precision so that all the dominoes fall in sequence. Four-dimensional dejarik, if you will, played against the ornery Wookiee that is the *Star Wars* canon. If Rian Johnson's new trilogy and David Benioff & D.B. Weiss' stories could be coordinated and woven together with other original films (including the one you've already announced), and even Disney + shows such as *The Mandalorian* and *Obi-Wan*, then the next phase of *Star Wars* could really be something strong enough to pull the ears off a gundark.

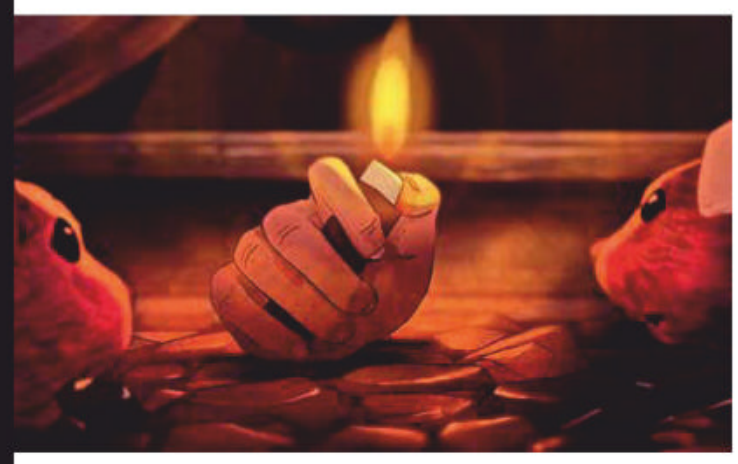
What, exactly, the story will be, I'll leave to you — it's been reported that you already have an idea (and an actor) in mind. But I'd love to see you bring the same level of emotional gut-punches and apocalyptic shocks that you managed to bring to the last two *Avengers* movies. Or perhaps you're the man to finally bring the long-anticipated *Knights Of The Old Republic* adaptation to the screen. Failing that, you can at least tie everything together and make Patton Oswalt's Skywalker/Thanos crossover fantasy from *Parks And Recreation* a reality.

Regards, James. PS Thrilled you worked out all the Spider-Man stuff. Brunch soon?

AN ACQUIRED TASTE

I LOST MY BODY

DIRECTOR JÉRÉMY CLAPIN ON HIS ANIMATED DRAMA ABOUT A SEVERED HAND SEARCHING FOR ITS OWNER



IT'S A QUIRKY ANIMATED FANTASY ABOUT A DISMEMBERED HAND SEEKING ANSWERS "Backers were sceptical when I told them the premise," Clapin laughs.

IT'S *THE ADDAMS FAMILY*'S 'THING' MEETS *AMÉLIE* Based on *Happy Hand* by *Amélie*'s Guillaume Laurent, it's also a love story. Clapin says, "I wanted his [the owner of the hand] meeting with [librarian] Gabrielle to be a tiny spark in the dark that would inspire him to take control of his destiny."

THE HAND HAS A MIND OF ITS OWN "It went in an otherworldly direction that I wasn't expecting," says Clapin. "To get the story just right, we needed to go weirder." **ELIZABETH AUBREY**

***I LOST MY BODY* IS OUT NOW ON NETFLIX**

No./14

Four new heroes, zero old capes

There's more to comics and graphic novels than supersuits and spandex, as these superhero-less smashes coming soon to a screen near you prove



Y: THE LAST MAN

IF YOU LIKE

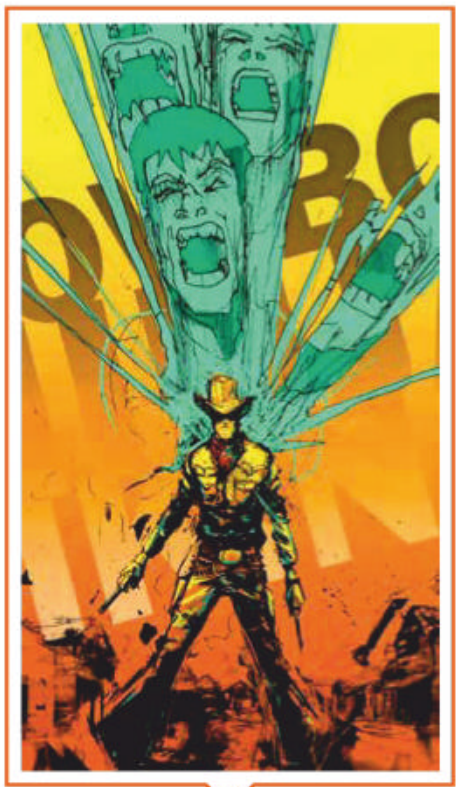
Gender politics, the Apocalypse and faeces-flinging monkeys.

WHAT'S IT ABOUT?

A mysterious plague wipes out the males of every species on the planet — except, that is, wise-cracking amateur magician Yorick Brown and his pet Capuchin monkey, Ampersand.

WHAT'S IT GETTING TURNED INTO?

An action-packed series set to air on US channel FX sometime in 2020, helmed by American playwright and *Animal Kingdom* producer Eliza Clark. It's gone through development hell to get here: at one point, way back in 2008, Shia LaBeouf was attached to star in a movie version by *Disturbia* director D.J. Caruso. But the decade of delays that *Y* has endured might end up playing in its favour: author Brian K. Vaughan's post-apocalyptic gendercide tale has the potential to pack an even more explosive punch in our post #MeToo era and conversations about toxic masculinity.



COWBOY NINJA VIKING

IF YOU LIKE

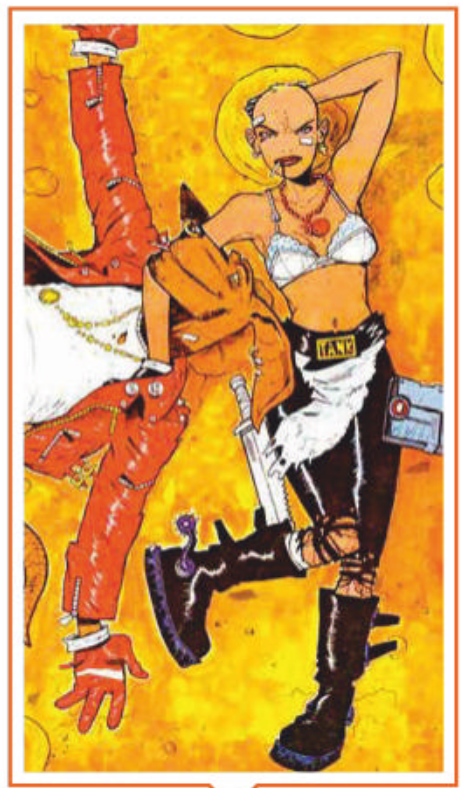
Chris Pratt holding an axe and a samurai sword, while wearing a cowboy hat.

WHAT'S IT ABOUT?

The US government experiments on sufferers of Multiple Personality Disorder, turning them into weapons in the war on terror. When those test subjects go violently rogue, only one man — with the skills of a cowboy, a ninja *and* a viking — can track them down.

WHAT'S IT GETTING TURNED INTO?

Priyanka Chopra is due to star opposite the once and future Star-Lord in this zany blockbuster, described by the latter as a "passion project unlike anything you've ever seen" on social media last year. There have been a few bumps in the road — the film was originally due for release this summer, but continually delayed over script concerns — but sources at Universal suggest it is still in active development. The director, Michelle MacLaren, is responsible for memorable episodes of *Game Of Thrones*, *The Walking Dead* and *Westworld*, adding to the anticipation.



TANK GIRL

IF YOU LIKE

Mutant kangaroo boyfriends, feminist punk anarchy.

WHAT'S IT ABOUT?

The clue's in the title. Tank Girl, a character created by artist Jamie Hewlett and writer Alan Martin in 1988, is a girl who lives in (you guessed it) a tank and enjoys sexual and substance-related misadventures in a futuristic, post-apocalyptic Australia.

WHAT'S IT GETTING TURNED INTO?

For Margot Robbie, being associated with *one* colourful, acerbic, take-no-prisoners comic-book queen is evidently not enough. The Harley Quinn actress' company, LuckyChap Entertainment, reportedly optioned the rights to make a new Tank Girl movie earlier this year, following a 1995 film that retains a cult following but flopped commercially (you might even say it tanked). No word yet on whether Robbie will play the titular punk in this remake/reboot, but the film is already several months into development, according to Martin.



LOCKE & KEY

IF YOU LIKE

Mystery, murder and things that go bump in the night.

WHAT'S IT ABOUT?

After their father is brutally murdered, three siblings return to their family home in Massachusetts. One minor complication, though: the keys to this house, it transpires, grant special powers to those who possess them, which a demon is hell-bent on fighting them for. Bet they didn't advertise that on Rightmove.

WHAT'S IT GETTING TURNED INTO?

The Stephen King connection is strong with this hotly anticipated horror adaptation. For a start, it's a tale of trauma, adolescence, grief and ghouls, classic Kingian tropes, the lot of them. It also happens to pack a star of the recent *It* movies, in the shape of child actor Jackson Robert Scott (Bode Locke). Oh, and did we mention Joe Hill, the author of the graphic novel, is the iconic spook-master's son? With Carlton Cuse (*Lost*) in the showrunner seat, *Locke & Key* could follow *Stranger Things* as Netflix's next child cast-driven, horror-tinged smash. **AL HORNER**

No./15 Both sides of the story







With *Waves*, director Trey Edward Shults makes an autobiographical drama — with a dramatic twist

HEARTBREAK COMES IN two distinct forms in Trey Edward Shults' sprawling, sensitive Florida-set family drama *Waves*. The film, a surprise hit at Toronto film festival, focuses on a suburban African-American family, and is split between the perspectives of the two children, Tyler (Kelvin Harrison Jr) and his sister Emily (Taylor Russell). Halfway through, the film makes the bold choice to completely upend its structure, switching from Tyler's viewpoint to Emily's when tragedy hits. His love story with his girlfriend Alexis (Alexa Demie) gives way to hers with her boyfriend Luke (Lucas Hedges).

"We knew the structure would be polarising," says Shults (whose last film was the apocalyptic thriller *It Comes At Night*) "but we just had to go for it". The filmmaker, who describes it as his most autobiographical film, says the genesis for the film initially came from music. "I saw it like a contemporary *Dazed And Confused*," Shults explains, "a soundtrack movie for kids in high school" — and it certainly boasts an eclectic soundtrack, featuring Frank Ocean, Animal Collective, Kanye West and Radiohead.

Initially, the script first only focused on the character of Tyler. "And then probably halfway through," Shults recalls, "there was an epiphany". Deciding to tell the story from two viewpoints, was how the writer-director 'found' the movie. "When it became Tyler *and* Emily — that's when it we felt the real DNA of what the movie was."

He'd found the structure. But Shults realised he needed some distance from telling such a personal story before completing it. "It's been brewing for a decade or more," he says. "Both couples [in the film] are my girlfriend and I at different phases. But because there's so much in it — the yin and the yang, the two halves forming that whole — I couldn't write when I was *in* it," he says. "I had to live through life, and gain perspective from the other side."

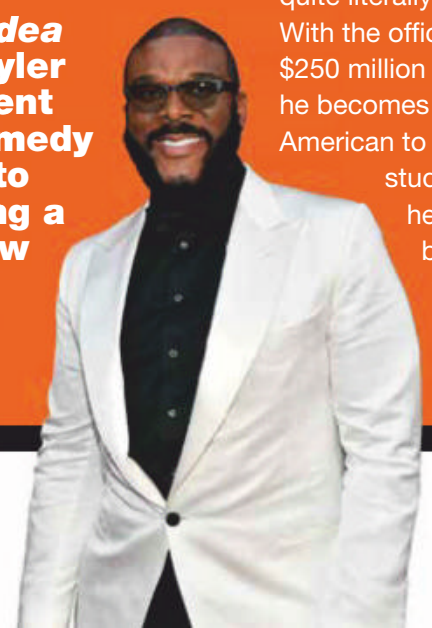
Changing your lead character halfway through a film is an approach that could, Shults acknowledges, be polarising, and some reactions out of Toronto reflect that. But the messiness is a neat reflection of life's messiness. "I find myself loving imperfect movies," Shults says, "because it becomes an intangible thing I connect with. That feels more like life to me." **ELLA KEMP**

Clockwise from top: The troubled Williams family; Siblings Kelvin Harrison Jr as Tyler and Taylor Russell as Emily.

***WAVES* IS TBC IN CINEMAS IN 2020**

No./16 PERRY GOES LARGE

Why *Madea* mogul Tyler Perry went from comedy movies to launching a huge new studio



Getty Images

THROUGHOUT HIS 21-year career, producer-playwright-director-writer-actor-TV mogul Tyler Perry has always liked to keep creative control. That made him rich when comedies like the *Madea* series (the 6'5" Perry also played the titular matriarch) and *Why Did I Get Married?* hit big. But his latest venture is, quite literally, his biggest yet. With the official opening of his $250 million Atlanta complex, he becomes the first African-American to own a production studio outright, and head of one of the biggest filmmaking facilities in the US.

The studio spans a whopping 135 hectares, making it larger than Paramount, Warner Bros. and Disney's Burbank studios combined. The sets include hotels, hospitals, a prison and a 3,250 square metre replica of the White House. The studio was built on land used as a Confederate Army base during America's Civil War, so the place where soldiers once schemed to enslave black people is now owned by one. As Perry said: "poetic justice". It's already been home to Damien Chazelle's *First Man*, *The Walking Dead* and *Black Panther* — but the real achievement of the house that Madea built will be to elevate African-American filmmaking voices. **AMON WARMANN**







Anthony Hopkins and Jonathan Pryce as Popes Benedict and Francis.

No./17 A Tale Of Two Popes

What does it take to play God's representative on Earth? The stars of The Two Popes reveal their holy methods

POPE BENEDICT ANTHONY HOPKINS

POPE FRANCIS JONATHAN PRYCE

THE MEN...

"He is a scholar. He's very old. He's got the voice of a rather older man, and the vocal cords are a bit husky. So I imitated that. I've got a baritone voice — I can't use that. Also, [Joseph Aloisius] Ratzinger's [Pope Benedict's birth name] got quite a distinctive German accent. I touch it on certain consonants. But I don't make a hard edge. Jonathan's got the major task.

"The day [Pope Francis] was elected to the papacy, the internet was full of images of him and me, constantly compared. I don't see it myself! But I took a great interest in him. His statements on the economy, on globalisation, on the environment — all the things you want to hear from a religious leader. And he was a man who had a life before he became a priest. He wanted to get married. He's a fascinating man to play."

THE RESEARCH...

"I read some book by Ratzinger, and a really very good book on the history of the papacy. [The research] is not too intense for me because I've been doing [this job] for a long time. I make sure it's not intense. I do put all my energy into it. But I love it. I enjoy it. The point about work for me is the preparation. You work and work and work on the preparation."

"I read a couple of biographies and watched a lot of YouTube [videos] of him. But I've been aware of him since he was invested. You read *The Guardian* at least once a week, and there'll be a Pope article. That informs you a great deal. I'm not saying I'm lazy, but the writers have done an incredible amount of research. What would I want to say to the real Pope? 'Big fan. Love your work.'"

THE DIFFERENCES...

"[Benedict] is a quiet, reserved, conservative kind of guy. But I try to invest him with compassion. We have this long talk [in one scene] and my suggestion to him, as Benedict, is: "You're only human." That's the most compassionate thing you can say — you're only human, you're not God. The world is a nightmare so be easy on yourself. Instead of saying you have the sin of pride, you say, 'You did the best you could.'"

"Well, [Anthony] is from south Wales and I'm from north. The biggest difference between Anthony and I is on the call sheet. I'm number one. And he's constantly bitter about this [*laughs*]. I can tell you we were contractually obligated to be offered the same-sized trailers. But I chose, like Francis, to have a smaller trailer. He can live in a palace as Benedict did, surrounded by finery. He's got a fucking big Cadillac. I chose the Audi Q5. That's the main difference!" **JOHN NUGENT**

***THE TWO POPES* IS IN CINEMAS FROM 5 DECEMBER AND ON NETFLIX FROM 20 DECEMBER**



SMALL TALK

AWKWAFINA

So what's the latest on *Shang-Chi*?
I've seen what was at the screen test, and I met with Destin [Daniel Cretton, director]. I think that this is going to be awesome. Destin is incredible and I'm a huge fan of all of his work, and I love that Simu [Liu] is going to be our next Shang-Chi. As far as I know, we're going into production in a couple of months but I'm here in New York now, doing my new comedy.

This is your TV show *Awkwafina Is Nora From Queens*?
I'm realising as I'm filming it, it's talking about real things and real people that happened to me but I'm kind of re-enacting them. It's been a little muddy. I wanted to really show what it was like to grow up where I grew up, with my grandma and my dad, and not forgetting [my] life before Awkwafina.

So it's a fictional take on real things that happened?
Yeah, a lot of the anecdotes are very real, it's definitely semi-autobiographical. We're shooting in Queens!

What are you up to today?
I have to meet my stylist. It's ironic because I'm wearing a shirt that was bought in a multi-pack. But it's nice to explore your personal style. I'm going to wear socks and slippers to my fitting later. That's literally what I wear.

CHRIS MANDLE

***THE FAREWELL* IS IN CINEMAS NOW**

Getty Images

No./18 The story behind 2019's weirdest doc

Exploring magic, mortality, misdirection and meth in The Amazing Johnathan Documentary







BACK IN THE 1980s, 'The Amazing Johnathan' — real name John Edward Szeles — was a staple of late-night TV, whose subversive mix of magic and stand-up comedy made him an icon among comedy nerds. Skip forward to 2014 and Szeles revealed on stage that, due to a heart condition, he had a year to live, and would be embarking on a farewell tour. First-time film director Ben Berman and his crew were there to follow him for the journey. "I thought I was gathering footage for a short film," Berman recalls, "about a magician confronting his mortality with humour and seriousness. And then, right before we were going on tour, he let me know about the *other* crew."

It soon emerges that the Oscar-winning team behind *Man On Wire* were also invited to film the tour by Szeles. Berman decided to acknowledge their presence in his film. "If a documentary is a medium that's supposed to seek the truth, how could I ignore the truth that there was an Academy award-winning crew there? So I decided to experiment and include my competition in the narrative. It went from very small expectations to, 'Okay, let's make a weird movie!'"

That's how a straightforward biographical account of a declining performer turns into something far more meta. "The movie deconstructs itself," says Berman, "just like Johnathan's magic act." Berman, undermined and sidelined by Szeles, soon puts himself in his own film while encountering more twists — including meth smoking, chainsaw juggling, and questions about what is real and what isn't.

"It's a movie about Johnathan, and it turns into a movie about me, but ultimately it's also a movie about the state of documentary filmmaking in 2019," says Berman, who knowingly includes a clip in the film from Marc Maron's stand-up comedy, complaining that there are too many documentaries these days. "It's a golden age of non-fiction storytelling. There are only so many stories. And that's what I lucked into, or un-lucked into: I figured out a way to have problems be a value."

How all those problems shake out, we won't reveal here. But Berman has no regrets for what became an unexpectedly challenging shoot. "I wouldn't change anything," he says. "Because to do it right would be wrong for this." There's some insane, Amazing Johnathan-esque logic to that. **JOHN NUGENT**

***THE AMAZING JOHNATHAN DOCUMENTARY* IS TBC IN CINEMAS IN 2020**

Top to bottom: The Amazing Johnathan mid-performance; With his documentarian, director Benjamin Berman; Yeah, this one gets weird.

CARTON OF MILK

KRISTEN BELL



ILLUSTRATION **ARN0**

Which character were you in your first school play?
I played a banana in the first act and a tree in the second. My tree was fine, just sort of part of the crowd, but the banana was where I really got to show what I could do.

What one thing do you do better than anyone else you know?
Pack. Like a motherfucker. I'm Mary Poppins. I anticipate my family's needs, so I know what they might want two days from now, even if they don't. And I was great at Tetris as a child. There is no wasted space. I might be the world's best packer.

How much is a carton of milk?
I'm going to say $5.49. That's really expensive? Good. I want the cows to be treated well and honoured for their service. I want them, like, living in a house, and I am prepared to pay for that.

Which movie have you seen the most?
It's a five-way tie between: *Aladdin*, *The Little Mermaid*, *Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade*, *Cry Baby* and *Waiting For Guffman*. Those are indicative of my entire emotional life from childhood to college age.

Have you ever had a nickname?
Okay, buckle up. When I was four, I was an unbelievably stubborn child. One day I decided Kristen was not cutting it and I needed a new name. I told my parents they had to start calling me Smurfette. It was Smurfette or nothing. For about two weeks I wouldn't answer to anything else. Eventually, they sat me down and said, "We cannot call you Smurfette. If you want a nickname, we can do that, but let's choose something else." I was, of course, furious, but I said, "Fine. Call me Matthew." That was my cousin's name. "No, that won't work either". We agreed on Annie, which is my middle name. Up until I was 16, all my family and friends called me Annie. My family still do.

What's the strangest place you've ever thrown up?
When you're 19, you can drink in Canada. I grew up by the Detroit-Windsor border [an area that covers the US and Canada], so my strangest place was aged 19 in a minivan coming back from Windsor, Canada. I threw up and my best friend Bob caught it in his hands. I'm so lucky to have him.

When were you last naked outdoors?
I am the opposite of a never-nude. I have no concept of whether I'm wearing clothes or not. There is an outside area between our bedroom and the laundry room, so I will often go outside nude to grab something. It's accepted in my friendship circle that sometimes you will see me nude. I will change in front of you because it doesn't occur to me not to.

Growing up, whose poster was on your wall?
The first time I showed my husband my childhood bedroom he saw a big poster of Antonio Banderas. He said, "You love Antonio Banderas? You never said." I said, "Yeah, I guess he's fine." "But you have his poster?" I shrugged and he said, "You went through puberty very late, didn't you? Did you put this poster up because other girls did and you thought you should?" He was 100 per cent right! It had never occurred to me. I wanted to fit in and I just put up the first poster I saw. He thought it was charming and the funniest thing in the world, and that's all I care about.

What is the worst smell in the world?
Seal poop. Smelled it in concentration while whale watching. Gagged so hard I thought my eyes were going to fall out.

What's your earliest memory?
I have no memories. I don't remember yesterday. Seriously, every day is a clean slate. I look at photo albums of my life and it's all brand-new information. Maybe it's because I'm used to memorising roles. I mean, I remember I was a banana. **OLLY RICHARDS**

COMING SOON

THE GOOD PLACE
(2019)
Bell leads the fourth and final season of this acclaimed sitcom, which mixes philosophy with fart jokes.

CENTRAL PARK
(2020)
An animated musical series about a family of Central Park caretakers; Bell voices alongside Josh Gad.

QUEENPINS
(TBC)
Bell signed up to star with Leslie Jones in this "coupon caper" movie about two real-life best friends who ran a $40 million scam.

FROZEN 2 IS IN CINEMAS FROM 28 NOVEMBER 2019

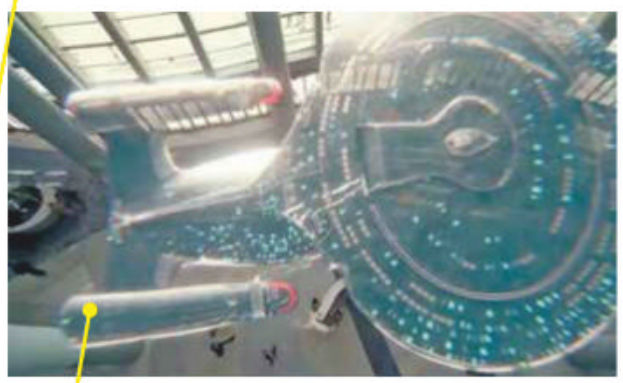
TRAILER TALK

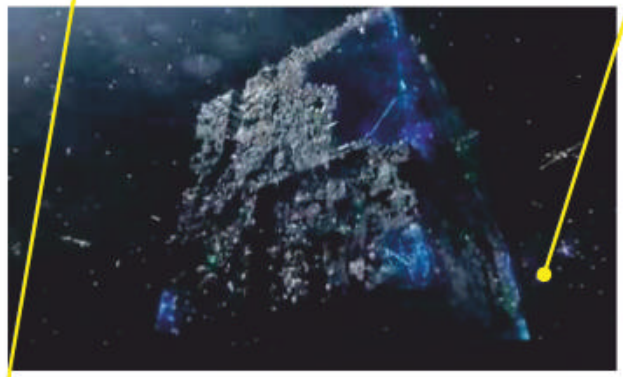
Star Trek: Picard

Unfiltered, uncensored, uncompromising trailer reactions from team EMPIRE

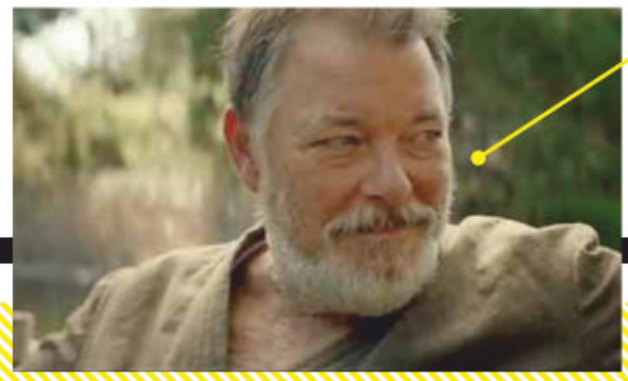






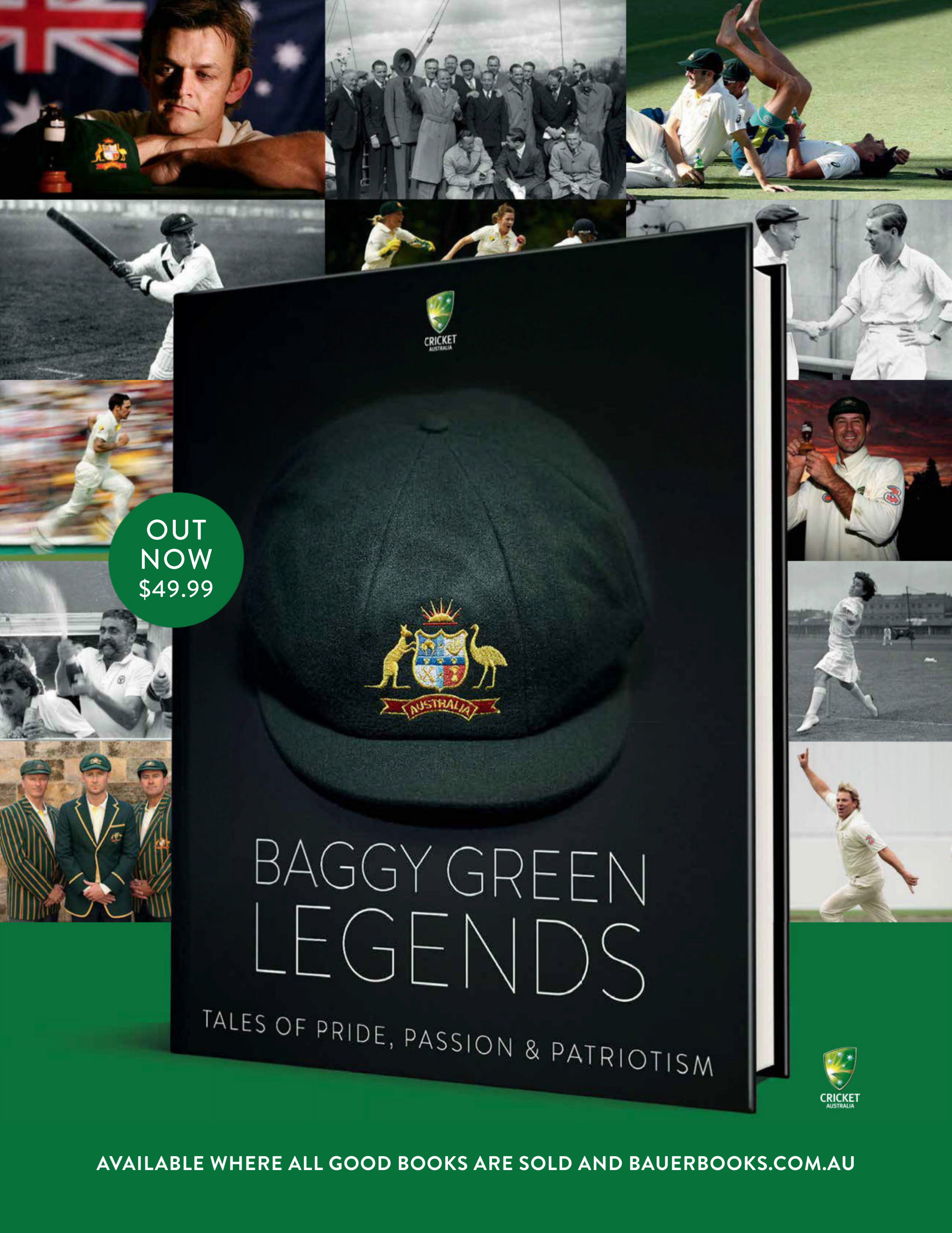






Liz Beardsworth (Associate Editor: Production): [*innocently*] So is this to do with *Star Trek*?
James Dyer (Editor-in-Chief, Digital): Data! Now as you know, Data was destroyed at the end of *Star Trek: Nemesis*...
Chris Hewitt (Associate Editor: ReView): We've made a huge mistake having James here.
James: That could be B-4, the proto-android that has Data's knowledge downloaded into him, or Lore, his evil twin, but I think it's a dream.
Liz: Until you explained all that it looked quite promising. Now it's very boring.
James: This might be Dahj [Isa Briones], the mysterious woman who comes to see Picard.
Jamie Inglis (Deputy Art Director): Was that battle shot a flashback?
James: They're not spaceships I recognise. It might be the fall of Romulus which is, I believe, what caused Picard to drop out of Starfleet.
Ben Travis (Online Staff Writer): This is a different timeline to the J.J. Abrams stuff, right?
James: Yes, this is the Prime timeline — literally given it's on Amazon.
Nick de Semlyen (Associate Editor: Features): This shot of Picard in bed, looking upset, is all of us listening to James.
James: Does that make me Number One, the dog? Licking your face while you sleep?
Helen O'Hara (Editor-at-Large): You're not that cute.
Jamie: Is that Patrick Stewart's own dog? He adopts pit bulls.
Joanna Moran (Photography Director): His home looks beautiful.
James: The Picard family vineyard, inherited by Jean-Luc after his brother died in a fire.
Ben: It's interesting that they still have flat caps in the future.
Nick: I'm looking forward to a series where he's just pottering around a vineyard.
Jo: My favourite *Star Trek* — I've only actually seen one — is where they go to San Francisco and SeaWorld.
James: That's a hologram of the NCC-1701-D Enterprise in Starfleet Headquarters, of course.
Chris: Oh Jesus. Does Dignitas do home visits?
James: This bit is interesting, with the androids. There's a *Next Generation* episode, 'The Measure Of A Man', where they're trying to use Data as a template to create a new generation of androids. These might be those.
Helen: This rainy scene is extremely *Blade Runner*-y by *Star Trek* standards.
Jo: There Dahj is again, looking all crack-y and bad.
James: That's where an implant was removed! She was assimilated, Jo.
Jo: I don't trust her.
James: Note the communicator there is not the original *Next Generation* communicator but the one introduced in *Deep Space Nine*, *Voyager* and the *Next Gen* movies.
[*short silence*]
Helen: Well, I think we're all glad we asked James along to this. But this is cool, because these are the Vasquez Rocks where Kirk famously fought...
Nick: A shit lizard man.
James: The Gorn.
Helen: And where Bill and Ted were killed by their evil doppelgängers in *Bogus Journey*.
James: That's Michelle Hurd as Raffi Musiker.
Ben: A space hippie.
Nick: For the record, James is looking these names up.
James: And this is Evan Evagora, who plays a Romulan ninja, Elnor.
Helen: Santiago Cabrera is obviously the Han Solo of the gang.
James: That is a heavily fucked-up Borg cube with forcefields maintaining its structural integrity. In the first trailer you saw a prison camp with Romulan guards and a sign saying "X days since the last assimilation" so the speculation is that these are former drones being kept by Romulans.
Nick: I feel like time has ceased to exist.
James: And look, that's an original Romulan Bird Of Prey. You don't see many of those anymore. Now Picard's doing a bit of swashbuckling. Look at his fencing technique, extraordinary.
Chris: He's old, he's doing well to be able to lift his arms at all. Why's Matthew Perry in this?
James: That is Hugh, Jonathan Del Arco, from the episode 'I, Borg'. He's a Borg who was freed from the Collective. And Seven Of Nine [Jeri Ryan] with phased pulse rifles. Love it! And here's Will Riker [Jonathan Frakes].
Helen: The original Number One, before he was a dog. He's still married to Troi [Marina Sirtis]. I am genuinely emotional.
Jamie: I've never seen football in *Trek* before.
James: This bit is all, spacey spacey shooty shooty. And then Dahj is burned. Probably another dream sequence, or this is a big spoiler.
Jamie: Riker's always got his chest out, though, doesn't he?
James: I think we can all agree: That. Was. Fabulous.

STAR TREK: PICARD IS ON PRIME VIDEO IN EARLY 2020



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No./19

Making an Adam Sandler film (with a difference)

Directors Josh and Benny Safdie on directing the comedy star in something different: a *really good* high-octane thriller

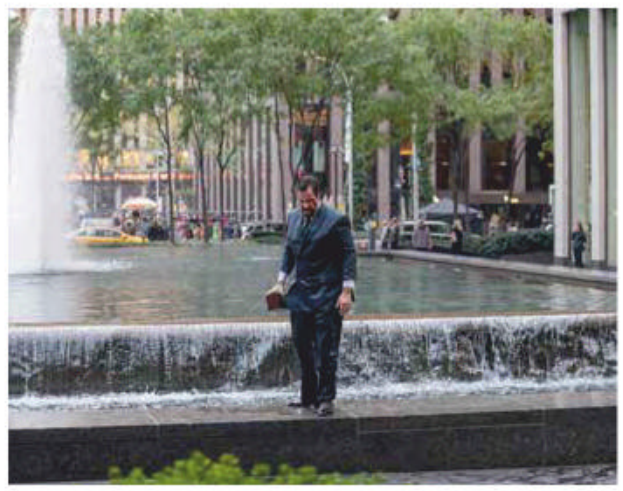
"CRITICAL HIT" IS not a phrase you often associate with Adam Sandler these days. But that's exactly what *Uncut Gems*, the latest film from New York filmmakers the Safdie brothers, offers. Sandler's turn as grimy gambler Howard Ratner has earned him the best reviews of his career. Here, the brothers explain their process.

THE LEADING MAN

While Sandler might seem a strange choice for a dark thriller, he was the obvious choice for his directors. "Look at his early comedies," says Benny. "The absurdity of the situations he faces — you *believe* these things are happening to him." Sandler's intensity was matched off-screen, too, says Josh: "[We] have yet to come across somebody who matches our work ethic and output. He trumped us. It was intense."

THE SETTING

The film plays out in New York's diamond district, as Howard navigates various pawn shops and his own business to keep a stable cashflow. "It's a place that's always intrigued us," Josh says. "The jewellery business is fascinating, because you're talking about people trying to buy their way into a certain place."





Wally McGrady/Julieta Cervantes

THE PACE

Since the project had been in the works for a decade, the Safdies had to cut a lot to maintain the film's explosive pace. "We decided to boil the script down to Howard racing against the clock, cheating God. And when you're cheating God, you're cheating fate, so you've gotta move really quick." The brothers excitedly had a prestigious observer: "We still can't believe it's true, but about three quarters through the edit, Paul Thomas Anderson came by and watched our film. He was like, 'Does it stay at this [pace]?' And we were like, 'Oh, it gets crazier.'" Benny adds, "He could have asked the question with a different intonation — *can* you stay at this pace?"

THE MUSIC

Sound is a key tool in evoking Howard's severe desperation. Daniel Lopatin, aka experimental electronic musician Oneohtrix Point Never, provides a relentless percussive score. "The score gave a pulse to the narrative of that movie, but *Gems* is a little bit more abstract," the brothers explain. "A lot of the music we use in this score is inspired by Jewish music and meditation accompaniments, but we're now repurposing them in what is probably the opposite of a meditation. We were looking for the score to be euphoric, in its own cosmic way." **KAMBOLE CAMPBELL**

***UNCUT GEMS* IS TBC IN CINEMAS IN 2020**

SCREEN

29 NOV – 27 DEC

BIG SCREEN. SMALL SCREEN. YOUR REVIEWS BIBLE STARTS HERE

★★★★★ EXCELLENT ★★★★ GOOD ★★★ OKAY ★★ POOR ★ AWFUL

[EDITED BY IAN FREER]



[FILM]

LITTLE WOMEN

★★★★★

OUT **1 JANUARY**
CERT **TBC** / **135 MINS**

DIRECTOR Greta Gerwig
CAST Saoirse Ronan, Florence Pugh, Emma Watson, Timothée Chalamet, Laura Dern, Eliza Scanlen, Chris Cooper, James Norton, Louis Garrel, Meryl Streep, Bob Odenkirk

PLOT Jo March (Ronan) is struggling to make it in 19th-century New York as a writer, when she's called home to the bedside of sick sister Beth (Scanlen). Through flashbacks, we see how the pair grew up with sisters Meg (Watson) and Amy (Pugh).

IF THERE WERE any remaining doubts that Greta Gerwig is a major talent in American cinema, put them to rest now. Her solo debut, *Lady Bird*, was a delight; this follow-up adaptation of an American classic takes an overly familiar story and makes it immediate and important and daring. In a year packed with fascinating films about women, here's the grandmother of them all.

Those who haven't read it tend to dismiss Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* as juvenalia, lacking in drama or purpose. Certainly, it has its fluffy moments (all the religious piety, and the bit with the hair curling), and yes, it is essentially about four nice middle-class white girls who get along okay in mid-19th-century Massachusetts. But it's also a story about women who want things for themselves, who have ambitions and good intentions (sometimes bad intentions) and hopes for the future that are not limited to marriage or children. That wealth of character, the sheer fact of taking women's wishes seriously, puts it up









Clockwise from left: The March sisters; Laura Dern's matriarchal Marmee; The strict Aunt March (Meryl Streep); Jo March (Ronan) and Laurie (Chalamet): just friends.

there with Jane Austen in terms of formative books for teenage girls. And Gerwig takes several bold storytelling choices that make this adaptation quite unlike any of its predecessors.

Her first is to adopt a non-linear timeline that introduces us to the March girls in young adulthood rather than adolescence. We meet Saoirse Ronan's Jo March standing uncertainly outside the door of a New York publisher, preparing to march in and bid for a literary career. By starting in her heroine's adulthood and flashing back through her younger years, Gerwig immediately centres the narrative on grown women, with real-world concerns worth treating seriously, and sidesteps the objections of those who dismiss anything about teenage girls as fundamentally unimportant.

Jo wants to be a writer, and rushes around the big city with ink-stained fingers and a part-time governess job while she struggles to make that happen. She has, we quickly learn, already turned down a marriage proposal from her friend Laurie (Chalamet) and she seems heady with freedom rather than bowed with regret. Ronan gives Jo pace and energy, a sense of restlessness even when she's sitting still. She's permanently unkempt and a little ruffled, and is often dressed, by costume designer Jacqueline Durran, in odd mismatches of clothing that feel as much New Romantic as 19th century. She looks like a writer, with all the chaotic energy that implies.

When we then flash back through life with her sisters and Laurie, it is mainly to give context to that figure. Their shared childhood plays become an early trial for her story-writing, Jo's time with Laurie a chance to explore life outside her own largely happy home. The theme of almost everyone's depiction here is the search for independence and the money that that necessitates. Jo wants not just to write but to earn a living at it; Meryl Streep's Aunt March counsels the importance of a good marriage as the only secure means of providing for one's future. Meg (Watson) settles for a respectable marriage to John Brooke (Norton) but occasionally strains against its limits; Laurie wants to find a life free of his uncle's rigid expectations. Every one of them — and especially Laura Dern's matriarchal Marmee — has to reckon with the limits their society places on them, and find a way to prosper despite them. It's all there in the book if you look, and in Alcott's own remarkably forward-thinking life, but it took Gerwig to play these themes to the hilt.

So the familiar beats are rearranged. The Marches' father (Odenkirk) is off fighting the Civil War but largely absent even when present; Marmee is do-gooding for local families and ›



sending supplies to the troops but displays real edge and not just saintly patience. Beth (Scanlen, impressively managing to avoid soppiness) plays the piano and hides shyly from those outside her family, but forms a bond with Laurie's uncle (Cooper); Meg still has moments of extravagance that she knows she cannot afford at the behest of wealthier friends. The story shift just makes it all feel weightier and more adult.

The sister who benefits most from Gerwig's rejig of the story is Amy (Pugh), the youngest, the artist, the one most a thorn in Jo's side. Despite playing Amy across both ages, Pugh gets the energy of the baby sister who wants to be part of everything spot-on, and tags along relentlessly behind Ronan and Watson in the teen scenes with the air of a much younger girl. But by initially skimming over her brattiest years, Pugh is allowed to present Amy as a determined and ambitious woman, and one who develops a little more poise and restraint than her older sister Jo. It's *almost* enough to make you forgive her for the many offences against Jo that we see as the film goes on, petty crimes that generations of readers have held against her, and her likeability here is another testament to Pugh's star power.

To balance all this feminine energy there's Chalamet's pitch-perfect Laurie, the enthusiastic outsider who joins the girls' games and bonds with Jo. Chalamet's established chemistry with Ronan serves them well; the pair elbowing each other and giggling at private jokes, capering around on their own while a more sedate dance takes place behind them. This never goes as far as Apple TV's *Dickinson* in introducing anachronistic modernisms, but there's a recognisably modern energy between Laurie and Jo, a sense that these are relatable and realistic young people who just wear slightly different clothes from today's generation. Of course, their bond can't last forever: Jo has bigger things in mind. Laurie's proposal scene therefore seems romantic and childish and disastrous all at once. And of *course* this Laurie slopes off to Europe to Byron about in a dissolute fashion; he practically has to. He had the hair already.



Top: Friedrich Bhaer (Garrel) and Jo March (Ronan) take centre stage. **Above:** The determined Amy March (Pugh).

It's almost unfair to single out just a few cast members. Dern, Streep's forbidding aunt, Cooper's soft-hearted Mr Laurence: they're all excellent — as is the crew. Durran loosens up the costumes and removes the corseted stiffness of some period dramas. Cinematographer Yorick Le Saux creates a look that's painterly without being prim, and Alexandre Desplat's score mixes a lightness of touch with sweeping beauty. You have to really hunt for nits to pick. The time jumps may sometimes be confusing for those who don't know the material. Jo's friend, Professor Bhaer, is played here by Louis Garrel, so he is once again far too handsome, too slim and much too young to match the book (though that may be something of a meta joke). And while Meg gets a few good scenes, she's still underserved compared with her younger sisters.

Gerwig saves her most impressive narrative flourish for the very end, with a finale that would absolutely delight Louisa May Alcott. It's a decision that will leave you thinking far more deeply than any other version of this story has managed, and one that instantly makes this the definitive big-screen *Little Women*. **HELEN O'HARA**

VERDICT **Not just for women of whatever size. Warm but never wishy-washy, cosy without being cutesy, this is a superb adaptation of the source and further evidence that Gerwig is the real deal.**



Andre Davis (Chadwick Boseman): takes being a cop seriously.

[FILM]

21 BRIDGES

★★★

OUT **NOW**
CERT **MA15+ / 99 MINS**

DIRECTOR Brian Kirk
CAST Chadwick Boseman, Sienna Miller, J.K. Simmons, Stephan James, Taylor Kitsch

PLOT When two criminals' raid on a restaurant leaves several NYPD cops dead at the scene, detective Andre Davis (Boseman) orders Manhattan to be put on lockdown. He has until 5am to hunt them down — but can he capture them alive, when another senior officer (Simmons) is baying for blood?

THERE ARE THREE things to know about *21 Bridges*. One: it does not star Jeff or Beau Bridges (talk about missing an open goal). Two: it was originally called '17 Bridges', after the number of water-crossings connecting Manhattan to elsewhere, until somebody realised mid-shoot that they'd missed a bunch. Three: it's the kind of high-concept, low-VFX, grown-up thriller that we really don't get much of anymore. Think of it as a missing Tony Scott/Denzel Washington team-up from the days of yore, although in terms of both quality and plotting it's closer to *The Taking Of Pelham 123* than *Crimson Tide*.

The actual lead is Chadwick Boseman, taking a break from being Black Panther (even if the word "avenger" is cheekily shoehorned into dialogue early on) to play equally solemn homicide cop Andre Davis. He's a guy who, as he helpfully explains multiple times, likes to look the devil in the eye. And that habit comes into play when two crooks (James and Kitsch) find a simple late-night drugs-snatch spiralling out of control, with seven dead police officers left behind. "Flood the island with blue!" Davis yells, ordering the closure of every possible escape route (the more accurate *21 Bridges And Four Tunnels* presumably didn't score well with focus groups). Cue an adrenalised, high-gloss, countdown-'til-dawn tale, as Davis and his new partner (an impressive, low-key Sienna Miller) hotfoot it around the city in pursuit of two guys who might not be the tale's only rotten apples.

Director Brian Kirk, who has made episodes of *Game Of Thrones* and *Penny Dreadful*, does a decent job elevating this rather slim set-up. The action is slick, brutal and crisply cut, particularly the first-reel raid, in which Kitsch is utterly convincing as a twitchy triggerman. And like the city in which it's set, the film keeps hustling along, with colourful supporting characters (a drug lord with a penchant for early-hours exercise-bike workouts; a smarmy Sudanese fence) entering and exiting at a brisk clip. Areas of central New York are used smartly, if sometimes a little on-the-nose-ly, with one tense encounter in the Meatpacking District going down inside a store room featuring a lot of pre-packed meat. With hard-boiled dialogue, sleek God's-eye views of the city and serious talent in supporting roles, you're not given a chance to get bored.

Even so, an air of overfamiliarity hangs over proceedings. Despite a few early scenes trying to build up his complexity, and a commanding performance, Boseman's incorruptible blue-suit is ultimately just a little bit dull. And the long-in-development script by Adam Mervis and Matthew Michael Carnahan, which originally featured a much older protagonist, feels both underwritten (after a huge deal is made of how unprecedented it is to shut down Manhattan's transit links, we never see any consequences to the decision) and overly trope-y (yes, there are smarmy FBI guys, and yes, that guy who often plays shady characters is revealed to be playing a shady character). It's far from a top-tier action flick, then, but if you go in not expecting too much, or Jeff Bridges, there's quite a bit to enjoy. **NICK DE SEMLYEN**

VERDICT **A refreshing break from VFX-laden spectaculars and a throwback to the pulpy cop thrillers of yesteryear, if not quite strong enough to ensure that Boseman's righteous cop gets his own franchise.**



Hero or villain? Russian oligarch Mikhail Khodorkovsky takes on the Putin regime.

[FILM]

CITIZEN K

★★★★

OUT **TBC JANUARY 2020**
CERT **M / 126 MINS**

DIRECTOR Alex Gibney
CAST Mikhail Khodorkovsky

PLOT A study of oligarch Mikhail Khodorkovsky who, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, earned a fortune in banking and oil production, becoming Russia's wealthiest man. Yet, speaking out against Putin's regime, he was arrested, accused of fraud and tax evasion and sentenced to 13 years in prison.

"HE WANTS TO be Jesus Christ but he has a past," says a commentator about oil oligarch Mikhail Khodorkovsky, and it stands beautifully as a high-concept encapsulation of the dramatic appeal of *Citizen K*. Alex Gibney's enthralling documentary has a central figure most dramas would kill for: a shady baron who duped his way to a fortune yet, following a 13-year stretch after being imprisoned for taking a stand against Vladimir Putin, seemingly became a principled opponent of modern Russia. In some senses, *Citizen K* shares some qualities of the masterpiece its title invokes. Like Orson Welles, Gibney never lets us get a handle on his leading man, the dizzying array of talking heads and Gibney himself never coming down on the side of saint or sinner.

Following impressive drone shots of Siberian oil factories and then establishing Khodorkovsky in exile in London, Gibney sketches the oligarch's rise to power during the break up of the Soviet Union, establishing the country's first bank by buying state vouchers from bewildered members of the public and ploughing the cash into his oil businesses. By the mid-'90s he was one of the seven men controlling 50 per cent of the country's economy. After his meteoric rise, his fall is just as swift. Criticising state corruption carried out by Putin, he is charged with tax evasion and fraud, and in a series of blackly comic show trials worthy of Armando Ianucci, is sent to prison.

Citizen K is Gibney's briskest, most coherent film for yonks, calling to mind early work such as *Enron: The Smartest Guys In The Room* and *Wikileaks: We Steal Secrets*. Without losing the thread of the narrative, he peppers the story with fascinating details both through archival footage (Putin on a TV show warbling his way through 'Blueberry Hill') and his own specially shot material (a shopping arcade with actors dressed as Stalin as a reminder of Russia's glorious past). He also broadens the film from a singular portrait to an overview of the sinister relationship between oligarchs and government and how that interplay undermines democracy.

Driven by Robert Logan and Ivor Guest's thriller-like score, Gibney and editor Michael J. Palmer tell the story at a fantastic lick — with clarity while acknowledging the knots — until the last act, when Khodorkovsky is released and leads the Open Russia movement against Putin from London. Unable to return to Russia under allegations of organising the murder of mayor Vladimir Petukhov, Khodorkovsky becomes a muted, ineffectual figure, Gibney slyly marking his lack of clout with cutaways of his Russian-based supporters unable to find a strong enough glue to stick up his posters. That he is living under the constant threat of murder — highlighted by the recent spate of Russian-inspired killings in the UK — is a bleak reminder of how far Putin's tentacles reach. It's a subject you feel Gibney could be investigating for years. **IAN FREER**

VERDICT ***Citizen K* is a rapid, absorbing, entertaining portrait of both a complex, charismatic man and a country in a political black spot. Perhaps its greatest strength is Gibney never force-feeding you the answers. Is Khodorkovsky hero or villain? You decide.**



This sure beat Westeros for a good night out.

[FILM]

LAST CHRISTMAS

★★★

OUT **NOW**
CERT **PG / 103 MINS**

DIRECTOR Paul Feig
CAST Emilia Clarke, Henry Golding, Emma Thompson, Michelle Yeoh, Lydia Leonard

PLOT Kate (Clarke) is a damaged, sloppy elf, working in an all-year-round Christmas shop in London's Covent Garden. After a chance meeting, handsome stranger and part-time cycle courier Tom (Golding) seeks to help Kate find the joy in not just Christmas, but life itself, while she struggles under the weight of family estrangement and past illness.

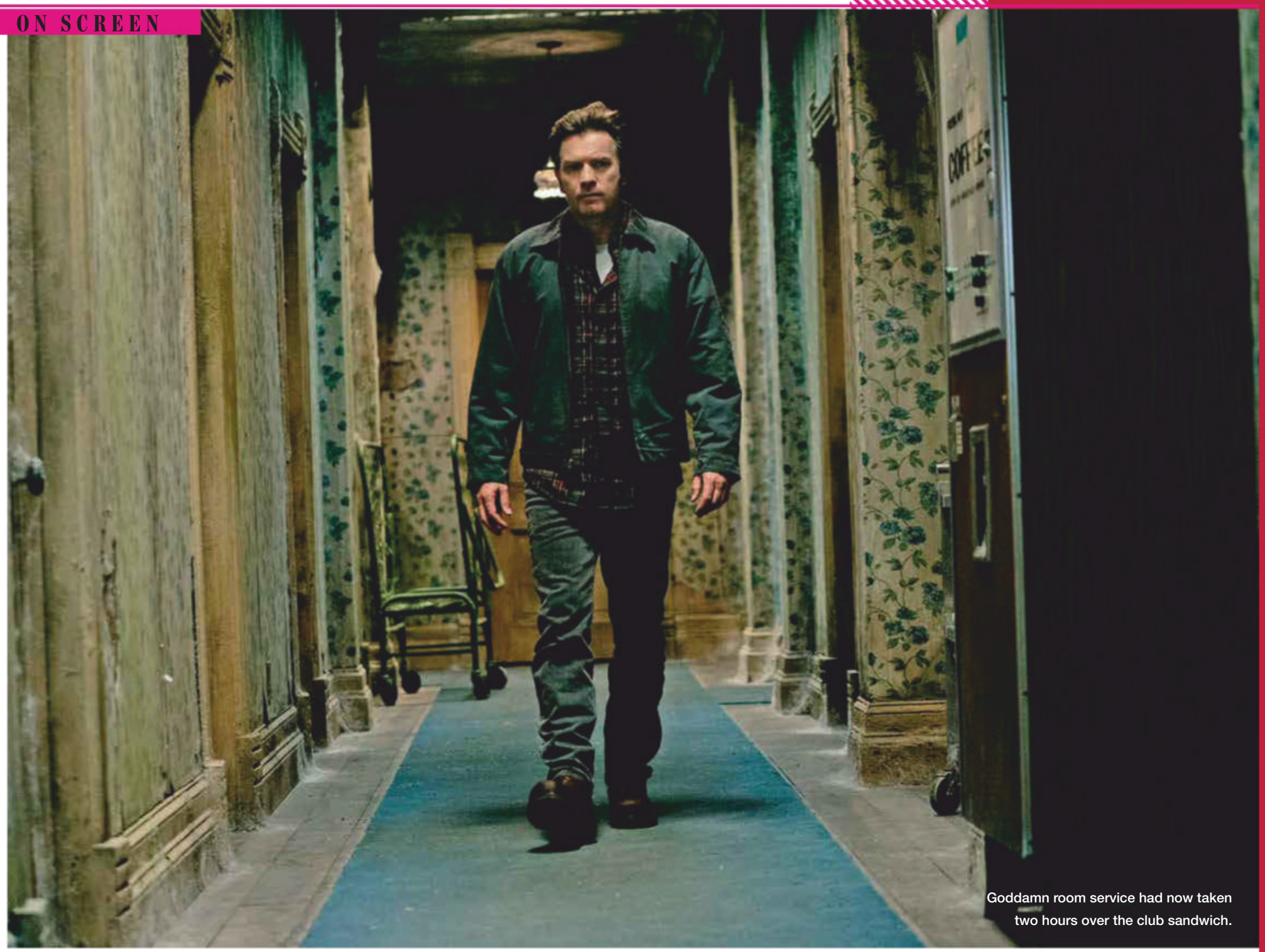
FROM THE OPENING minutes of *Last Christmas*, it's clear that Kate (Clarke) — or Katerina, as her traditional mother from the former Yugoslavia calls her — is a mess. Not just a mess. But a hot mess. And every trope that term carries is delivered with a wallop: she has casual sex with strangers, drinks pints in pubs alone, bleaches her hair, neglects her once-fragile health, applies fat strokes of smudged black eye make-up, pulls a leopard-print coat around her shoulders tightly, kills a goldfish, and disappoints all of her once-patient friends over and over.

It's crystal clear that the theme is 'Heal The Pain', the George Michael song that Kate has loved since being a kid, which becomes the almost-Dickensian mission statement of Tom (Golding), a charming man who, after a seemingly random encounter, seems intent on making her see the hope and goodness in the world. But the more he takes Kate on adventures through a fairy-lit London, the more she tries to resist his attempts to get her to "look up" and see the everyday beauty she's missing in her nigh-on nihilistic approach to living. A survival-mode cynicism born out of a health crisis she prefers not to discuss. But while the wound remains raw, Kate will never find peace.

The damp chemistry between Golding and Clarke takes some time to light, but eventually does so in the hands of a sweet, smart, funny script by Emma Thompson (who also plays Kate's difficult mother), Greg Wise and Bryony Kimmings ("Has anyone ever told you that there's something serial killer-y about you?" Kate asks Tom during an early meeting). Both actors deliver solid, if broad, performances, with the exception of a scene which examines the soft bits hiding below Kate's pain. It's a much-needed moment of true, sobering substance, but it's all too fleeting. The two are aided by a stellar supporting cast outside of Thompson, particularly Michelle Yeoh as Kate's boss 'Santa', a Christmas-obsessive who enjoys her own weird, utterly enchanting romance.

While stretching the credulity and credibility of Kate's story — both the twists and turns within her own dysfunctional family and her burgeoning romantic relationship — *Last Christmas* still strains to be more than just a festive romcom. It takes in the painful consequences of Brexit, the reality of homelessness, the fear of the refugee community, the crippling trauma of illness and the increasingly fragile bonds of family. Some are handled more effectively than others — the homeless characters are often just two-dimensional props to a struggling plot — but the push for social relevance within what could simply be a sickly-sweet construct is admirable. **TERRI WHITE**

VERDICT **While it won't be remembered as one of the great Christmas films, *Last Christmas* delivers enough moments of heart and humour to keep the festive spirit alive.**



[FILM]

STEPHEN KING'S DOCTOR SLEEP

★★★

OUT **NOW**
CERT **MA15+ / 151 MINS**

DIRECTOR Mike Flanagan
CAST Ewan McGregor, Kyliegh Curran, Rebecca Ferguson, Alexandra Essoe

PLOT Decades after his ordeal at the Overlook Hotel, Dan Torrance (McGregor) is a hospital orderly who uses his psychic gifts to help the dying pass on. But then a more powerful young girl, Abra Stone (Curran), makes contact with him — and in doing so attracts the attention of a vampire group who will stop at nothing to hunt Abra down...

PERHAPS IT'S APT that *Doctor Sleep* is a movie about dealing with the ghosts of the past, because it has a couple of doozies of its own to contend with. As, despite the title, Mike Flanagan's movie is not a remake of the 2002 Goran Višnjić psycho-thriller, but instead a sequel to *The Shining*... and *The Shining*.

A quick explanation: Kubrick adapted King's novel in 1980. King didn't like it. Kubrick didn't much care, for his sole foray into horror was rated an instant classic. But King hated it enough to make his own, wildly inferior version for TV and, then, just a few years ago, write a novel sequel that basically acted like the Kubrick movie didn't exist.

It's that novel that Flanagan has adapted for the big screen. But, at the same time, *Doctor Sleep* is also a direct continuation of the Kubrick adaptation. It's King's floorplan, but with Kubrick's furniture. And, after getting King and the Kubrick estate to sign off on that, perhaps Flanagan's next trick could be sorting out Brexit.

Venturing into Kubrick territory is perhaps symptomatic of the confidence coursing through Flanagan's veins after the last couple of years saw him pay off, with his Netflix adaptations of *The Haunting Of Hill House* and that man King's *Gerald's Game*, the early potential of horror flicks like *Oculus* and *Ouija: Origin Of Evil*. Yet, he's wise enough here not to merely ape Kubrick's funkiest moves. There are moments where he recreates direct shots and revisits locations from the original movie (you'll know them when you see them), but this is not 'The Shining Part II'. Where that film was a claustrophobic study of madness, paranoia and corruption, *Doctor Sleep* is an expansive, sombre, multi-location, multi-character drama, a world away from its progenitor. Interestingly, despite more redrum than you could shake a kcits at, it isn't particularly scary or unsettling. Perhaps Flanagan knew that trying to match *The Shining* in the terror stakes was a fool's errand. Perhaps the flaws in King's story, which keeps its trio of central characters apart for a length of time that could either be called character-building, flabby or plain boring (depending on your point of view), make jolts harder to come by.

Instead, it's a warmer film than Kubrick was perhaps ever capable of, and more interested in its characters. McGregor, after Renton in *T2 Trainspotting* and Christopher Robin in the film of the same name, is cornering the market in middle-aged characters revisiting their formative years, and he's perfectly solid as the haunted Dan Torrance, if never quite able to suggest that he's the fruit of Jack Nicholson's loony loins. Spikier, sparkier performances are given by newcomer Kyliegh Curran as the indefatigable Abra, and Rebecca Ferguson as callous psychic vampire Rose The Hat. Whether she's meditating on top of a camper van or floating through the clouds in a trippy sequence, the film never feels more alive than when Flanagan focuses on its villain. Just like Kubrick found with Jack. Maybe this is 'The Shining Part II', after all. **CHRIS HEWITT**

VERDICT **Working off source material that is very different from its predecessor, anyone expecting a straightforward *Shining* sequel will be disappointed. This isn't a gruelling exercise in pure horror. It's odder and more contemplative, but worth checking into.**



Wait, was someone singing 'Let It Go'?

[FILM]

FROZEN II

★★★★

OUT **NOW**
CERT **PG** / **103 MINS**

DIRECTORS Jennifer Lee, Chris Buck
CAST Idina Menzel, Kristen Bell, Josh Gad, Jonathan Groff

PLOT The kingdom of Arendelle is at peace. Kristoff (Groff) is planning a proposal to Anna (Bell), snowman Olaf (Gad) is loving life in the sun, and Elsa (Menzel) is content in her role as queen — until she hears a mysterious song calling her out into the wilderness.

AS A RULE, animated Disney princess movies don't get theatrical sequels — they end, by definition, with 'happily ever after'. But then, 2013's *Frozen* went far beyond your average animated Disney princess movie, a $1.2 billion box office behemoth that subverted fairy-tale notions of true love, with an earworm soundtrack that sent frazzled parents loopy on endless repeat listens. So it is that *Frozen*'s happy ending gives way to a big-screen sequel that — as they tend to — goes bigger, bolder, and more epic.

A lush, confident opening act establishes the new status quo — Elsa (Menzel), in control of her ice powers, is ruling Arendelle and living with love and warmth among sister Anna (Bell), soon-to-be brother-in-law Kristoff (Groff), and goofy snowman Olaf. The frosty palette is swapped for a gorgeous autumnal aesthetic — all golden leaves and open fires — bolstered by a string of stirring musical numbers that deal beautifully with ideas of growth and impermanence ("I can't freeze this moment, but I can seize this day," sings Elsa). *Frozen II* isn't just set in a season of change — it's about the inevitability of it.

It's also a more mature film that deals with notions of maturity, for an audience that has itself grown up in the six years since the previous outing. That means an expansive, mythical tone as the gang sets off on a quest tied into a mystery around Elsa and Anna's family history, leading to a meandering middle act — the mystery remaining narratively vague for too long, and largely obvious in hindsight. The mythology-extending doesn't always succeed, delivering backstory and familial revelations in hazy, hasty exposition that leaves big questions unclear come the credits.

But *Frozen II*'s plot missteps are more than compensated for by another suite of hits. Olaf gets a particularly witty number in 'When I Am Older', repressing his trauma as he's menaced by forest spirits, while the monolithic spectre of 'Let It Go' is not only winked at in a sharp gag, but followed up with a double whammy of Elsa-bangers, two fresh songs of spine-tingling self-discovery – the propulsive 'Into The Unknown' and mystical 'Show Yourself'. Neither quite matches the last film's breakout hit, but both come close.

Where *Frozen II* does surpass its predecessor is the jaw-dropping animation — with metaphysical character-driven sequences boasting imagery more emotionally intuitive than any expository dialogue. A scene of Elsa taming a spectral water-horse in the heart of a raging sea is simultaneously frightening, beautiful and enigmatic, drawing to mind Rey's finger-clicking journey to self-discovery in *Star Wars: The Last Jedi*.

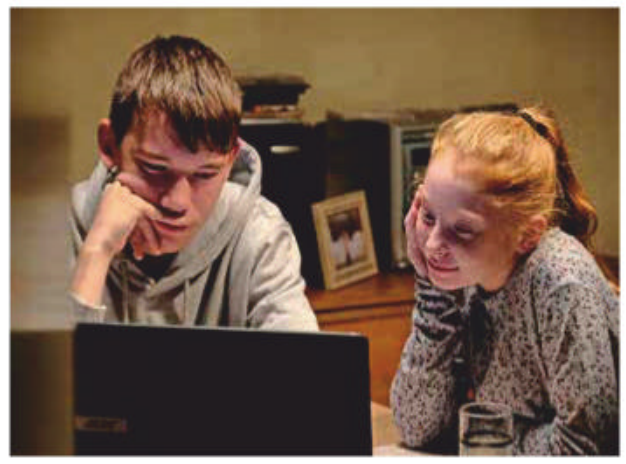
If the action finale underwhelms, *Frozen II* still delivers where it really counts — the emotional beats and relationship between Elsa and Anna, who continually strengthen and uplift each other across the runtime. There's enough greatness to make *Frozen II* worth Disney breaking its big rule for. And that in itself is a happy ending. **BEN TRAVIS**

VERDICT **The best things about the first film — the characters and music — once again sing in a frequently dazzling if narratively flawed sequel that's better at being sensory than sense-making.**



Struggling dad Ricky (Kris Hitchen) with daughter Lisa Jane (Katie Proctor).







Top to bottom: Teenage son Seb (Rhys Stone); The siblings, one sullen, one sunny; Debbie Honeywood as carer Abbie.

[FILM]

SORRY WE MISSED YOU

★★★★

OUT **26 DECEMBER**
CERT **MA15+ / 101 MINS**

DIRECTOR Ken Loach
CAST Kris Hitchen, Debbie Honeywood, Rhys Stone, Katie Proctor, Ross Brewster

PLOT Family man Ricky (Hitchen) enters into the insecure gig economy as a delivery driver in hopes of buying a house for his wife Abbie (Honeywood) and kids Seb (Stone) and Lisa Jane (Proctor). When the pressures sparked by the culture that goes along with such enployment start to tell, a catastrophic series of events is triggered for the family.

YOU JUST KNOW, from the opening conversation between Ricky and his new supervisor Maloney (Brewster) in Ken Loach's searing social drama, that this is not going to be a happy journey to follow.

Set in a soulless depot in Newcastle, UK, the delivery company that Ricky is signing up to work for signifies the rising, damaging human costs within this specific contemporary gig economy culture that leaves people like Ricky without sick pay, holiday, or any sense of stability in spite of the job's empty promises of self-made power.

"You don't work for us, you work with us," growls Maloney, a bald-headed wardrobe of a boss whose successful warehouse operation it transpires is built on a merciless stance against the tough, unpredictable circumstances that his drivers endure, which he emphasises with a self-given title of "patron saint of nasty bastards."

With his status as an independent contractor comes a relentless wave of responsibility in comparison to traditional employment — drivers must provide their own vans, an ominous tracker records Ricky's movements throughout the day — but blind hope and a desperate need to provide a better future for his family push Ricky forwards into an all-consuming routine of running between houses, accruing longer routes, and eventually urinating into a plastic bottle gifted to him in order to save more precious time.

In earlier scenes Ricky is boyish, never missing an opportunity to turn the mundane into something fun. On a particularly good day, he takes daughter Lisa Jane out in the van and they share sandwiches against a gorgeous hilly landscape (illuminated by Robbie Ryan's staggering cinematography). He met wife Abbie at a rave when they were young, and together they work with teeth-grinding determination to give more opportunities to sullen teen Seb and his younger sister Lisa Jane. It's Seb who will inevitably break the camel's back, causing Ricky to take off work without sourcing cover, an intolerable offence within his self-accountable job that sees him heavily penalised —including financially.

Loach takes great care to construct a deep-rooted compassion within the family. He peppers their struggle with moments of stolen joy — when the family sit to enjoy a takeaway curry for a rare family dinner, you feel the value of the treat.

Some storytelling is patchy — Seb's character arc as a demonised delinquent who can't see the world beyond his smart phone feels excessive — and calls to question whether events need to turn quite so dire for Loach to make his point.

Regardless, *Sorry We Missed You* is an important and timely watch. As Loach's Palme d'Or winner *I, Daniel Blake* bore down on the Department for Work and Pensions and a toxic culture that neglects the vulnerable, his new film arrives at a time when the gig economy is thriving without an end in sight, promising those in need choice and control when the reality is not just untrue, but life-threatening. This is a pivotal chapter for Britain, where thousands of families like those that Ricky and Abbie have created are struggling to survive, and the director is not in the mood to muddle messages. **BETH WEBB**

VERDICT **Though relentless at times, this is a crucial, empathetic rally cry of a film that holds a mirror up to the swelling crisis of the gig economy with admirable intention.**



Lost in her own kingdom, Olivia Colman's Elizabeth.

[TV]

THE CROWN: SEASON 3

★★★★★

OUT **NOW**
EPISODES VIEWED **10/10**

SHOWRUNNER Peter Morgan
CAST Olivia Colman, Tobias Menzies, Helena Bonham Carter

PLOT It's 1964, and Britain has a new left-wing Prime Minister in Harold Wilson. Over the next decade, the country will see miners' strikes, the moon landings and the arrival of David Bowie. It's all changing a bit quickly for the Queen, who is struggling to see where her family fits.

THINGS ARE CHANGING in Buckingham Palace, and the country it's fenced off from, in Season 3 of *The Crown*. For starters, everyone looks different. The Queen, Prince Philip and Princess Margaret are now played by Olivia Colman, Tobias Menzies and Helena Bonham Carter. All fabulous, of course, which will be a surprise to nobody. The changes are more than cosmetic. Where the first two seasons were broadly about a monarch establishing her place in the world, Season 3 has the Queen settled in her purpose but finding she's adapted to a world that no longer exists. Britain in the 1960s and '70s is charging into the future. The monarchy is wedged in the past.

What *The Crown* continues to do superbly is to use the royal family as eyes on a changing world. Cosseted from normal life, they observe Britain almost like aliens being dropped on a strange planet. For much of this series, the Prime Minister is Harold Wilson (Jason Watkins), a proper leftie who thinks the monarchy is a waste of money. In their regular meetings, over which develops a slow but deep respect, he shows Her Majesty a country that is struggling economically, leaving behind old-fashioned traditional values and wondering why it's paying millions for a living tourist attraction when everyone else is struggling to keep the lights on. Though she wouldn't be so gauche as to speak it, you can see the horror and confusion slapped across the Queen's face. For the first time, she has to justify her existence.

The family's existential crisis is beautifully observed. Margaret finds the era suits her love of a party and a wild affair, but she wants it both ways: freedom to live and love, but with all the good bits — luxury and fealty — of being a royal. In a stand-out episode about Prince Philip's obsession with the moon landing, Mr Queen laments what he might have achieved free of royal duty (less than he thinks, probably). Charles (Josh O'Connor) struggles with the hypocrisy of his family, who encourage him to embrace the freedoms of the real world but not publicly.

Basically, this is a portrait of a family that needs an awful lot of therapy but couldn't possibly admit to it. Colman is flawless playing a Queen who appears cold, but that's as a result of training, not true feeling. She is so defined by her duty, her humanity has been crushed down. In one excellent scene, after she's been reluctantly sent out to give comfort to a village hit by a mining disaster, the Queen confesses she had to fake her crying. Then, in the kind of tiny silent moment Colman can fill with unsaid words, she sheds a slow tear in private. You cannot suppress this much emotion without something breaking.

Season 3 shows *The Crown* can handle the more soapy elements of the royal story with humour, dignity and real emotional intelligence. Which is good news, because Diana is still to come. **OLLY RICHARDS**

VERDICT **In perhaps the strongest season yet, *The Crown* digs deep into a family that's crumbling like the ancient palace they inhabit. It continues to reign supreme.**

ON SCREEN CHECKLIST

Your at-a-glance view to this month's reviews



OUT NOW

THE CROWN: SEASON 3	★★★★★	P37
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26 DECEMBER

SORRY WE MISSED YOU	★★★★	P36

1 JANUARY

LITTLE WOMEN	★★★★★	P28
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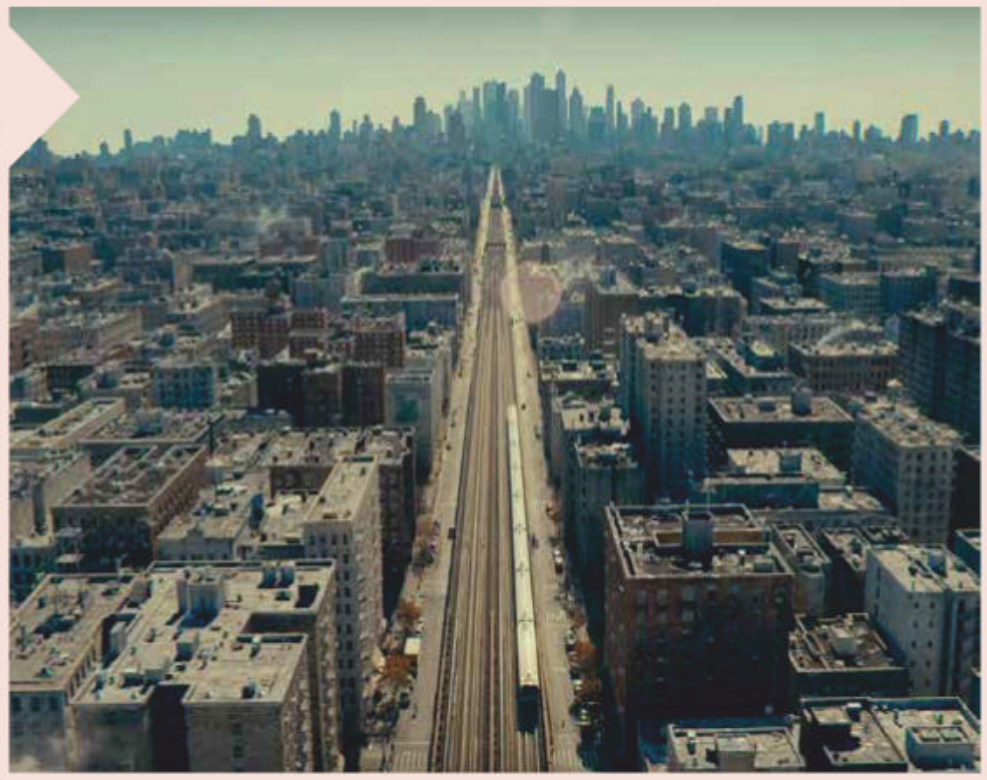
BEN TRAVIS
Online Staff Writer,
Empire



Funny guy: Joaquin Phoenix as Arthur Fleck, in his Joker guise.

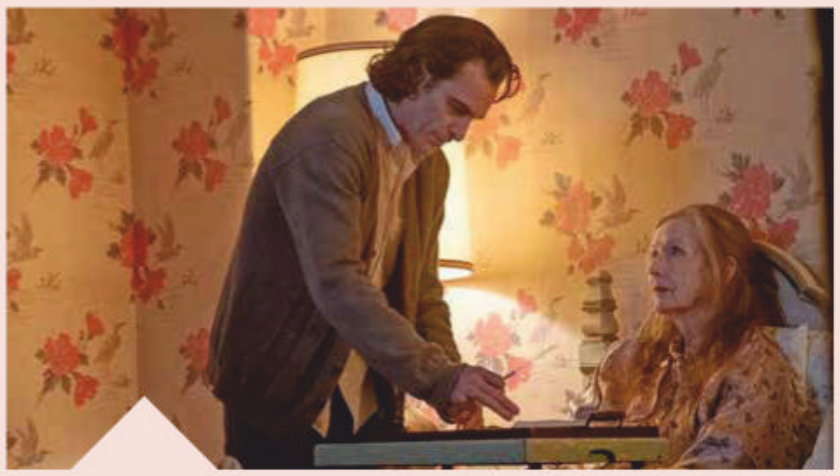
1 GOTHAM 1981

Ben Travis: Every screen adaptation of the Bat-verse gets the Gotham it deserves — and *Joker*'s take on the city of crime is perhaps the bleakest. The realism conjured by Christopher Nolan's Dark Knight Trilogy remains, but where those films reflected the urban fears of the 2000s — the threat of grand terrorist plots and the spectre of white-collar crime on Wall Street amid a cold, gleaming cityscape — *Joker* dials things back to the urban decay of late-'70s/early-'80s New York. The streets, appropriately considering the level of Scorsese homage on display, feel mean, populated by petty criminals who skulk in dark, graffiti-strewn alleys, the city's sidewalks piled high with rubbish and playing host to seedy porn cinemas. More than any other Batman film, *Joker*'s Gotham is closer to the New York of, yes, *Taxi Driver*, but also *The Warriors* — an exaggerated urban environment where the scuzzy subways become a stage for acts of brutality, where the raging citizens are ready to take violent action. Viewed through Arthur Fleck's eyes, this Gotham feels even more dangerous than any other because it's a world without warmth or kindness — the lack of care for the city itself reflecting a lack of care between its inhabitants.



Gotham in all its 'glory'.

WARNING! SPOILERS! SPOILERS! SPOILERS! SPOILERS!



2 MRS FLECK

Ian Freer: Penny Fleck (Frances Conroy) is the major female figure in *Joker*. Seemingly a secondary character designed to convey a hint of goodness in Arthur, who dotes on her, as the film develops, she emerges as the major catalyst for his transformation into Joker. Arthur grew up believing Penny was just in the employ of Thomas Wayne, yet there is a triple whammy of revelations when Arthur discovers he might be a product of a romantic relationship, then is told he was actually adopted, and then he learns Penny spent some time in Arkham State Hospital. A flashback to Penny reveals the truth, or a version of it: she was a delusional narcissist who let her partner abuse Arthur, unbalancing his mental state. This is the biggest influence on Arthur becoming Joker, the torment he suffered as a child giving rise to Joker's trademark laugh. In perhaps Phillips' attempts to play with what is real and what is not real, there is little actual information given about Arthur's real father. But perhaps that is a fruitful area for any sequel to explore.



4 THE WAYNE FAMILY

Todd Phillips: I liked leaving the idea of Arthur being Thomas Wayne's (Brett Cullen) son ambiguous. Part of the fun is that question being out there. What would that change if Joker is somehow a blood relation to Bruce Wayne (Dante Pereira-Olson)? Part of the movie is a search for identity. Arthur's idea is to fit in and belong somewhere. So this idea of Arthur not knowing who his father is, where he came from, if he was adopted, what the story was, was another element in his search for identity.

A lot of people have compared Thomas Wayne to Donald Trump. That's not intentional and I don't see it. In fact, someone said to me at a screening that they see the parallels between Joker and Donald Trump because Joker became this unwitting leader. There are people who believe Donald Trump didn't want to be President, didn't want to end up where he is. And then he has these fervent followers looking up at him. I thought that was a more interesting idea than Thomas Wayne is Trump.





3 THE SUBWAY ATTACK

Todd Phillips: The deliberate choice was to make everything feel really real, to put real-life stakes on violence. We are used to seeing violence handled in a cartoonish way with very little outcome or repercussions. We thought if we were going to run everything through a realistic lens — be it Gotham or his laugh or why he paints his face white — we should paint the violence through a realistic lens. That scene is the first time you see any real violence in the movie.

Ian Freer: Like a lot of the film, the subway attack makes great use of a puke-green fluorescent light (hats off DP Lawrence Sher). While it's at once expressionist, it also feels real and gritty, perhaps influenced by *The Taking Of Pelham One Two Three* [1974]. Phillips might be filtering this scene through a prism of realism, but in some senses this is for me the most unrealistic scene in the movie. It's a scene that asks us to believe a group of rowdy Wayne Enterprise yahoos (Carl Lundstedt, Michael Benz, Ben Warheit) are word-perfect on Stephen Sondheim's 'Send In The Clowns'. How likely is that?

Todd Phillips: Arthur goes through four things in that scene; at first he's kind of a jerk because these guys are accosting a woman (Mick Szal) in the subway and he's just watching — you're like, 'Fucking Arthur, do something.' Then it turns on Arthur and he's a victim and now you feel bad for him. Then Arthur is acting in self-defence as he kills a couple of guys. Then he turns predator and hunts down a guy he doesn't need to hunt down. In one scene, and this is why Joaquin is such a brilliant actor, you go through four different versions of what he can be.

Clockwise from above left: Arthur tends to his frail mother, Penny (Frances Conroy); Getting unwanted attention from a drunken Wall Street thug (Ben Warheit) on the subway; Turning nasty; Charlie Chaplin in *Modern Times*; Brett Cullen as billionaire Gotham mayoral candidate Thomas Wayne.



5 MODERN TIMES

Ian Freer: It's no accident Thomas Wayne is watching *Modern Times*. It not only stars cinema's ultimate clown — Charlie Chaplin — it is also a film baked in economic and social chaos just like *Joker*. Chaplin, like Arthur, is literally close to the edge.

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6 ARTHUR AND SOPHIE

Todd Phillips: Zazie Beetz's character [Sophie Dumond] is really key to the revelation in the movie. It's a key moment for the audience to wake up. It's a fun thing to make a movie about an unreliable narrator who is also delusional. Because there's a way to look at this movie in that he's telling us this story from inside the Arkham State Hospital at the end of the movie. I don't understand how much of this story is true or is just the way that he is telling it. In other words, did he really get beaten up by five 12-year-old kids for his sign or is he maybe saying that to make us feel bad for him? There's so much delusion in the movie that you start questioning: what's his angle on it and what is actually the truth?

Left: Arthur's neighbour, single mum Sophie Dumond. **Below:** Let the transformation begin. **Bottom:** Grooving to Gary Glitter.





7 THE APARTMENT MURDER

James Dyer: Coming around 90 minutes into the film, the sudden, brutal, bloody death of Randall (Glenn Fleshler) in Arthur's apartment is *Joker*'s defining moment. After an hour-and-a-half of creeping, gradual build-up, the film finally opens the valve for an explosive release, letting it all out in a burst of savagery and a fountain of arterial blood. While the subway killing sets Fleck on the path to what he will ultimately become, it's not until this moment that he truly becomes Joker, embracing the nihilistic brutality that defines him. Driving a pair of scissors into his former colleague's neck, the restraint Fleck has struggled with until that moment is cast aside entirely as he proceeds to smash the off-duty clown's skull, sinking panting to the floor, his white-masked face now spattered with gore.

It's unwarranted, unexpected and entirely unjustifiable, but in that one moment Arthur seems to have found himself. No longer the downtrodden mess, the butt of every joke, he's taken control for the first time and, however disturbing the imagery or irresponsible the depiction, it's this one act, more than any of the carnage that follows, which embodies Todd Phillips' 'Clown Prince Of Crime'.

Ian Freer: Phillips may have said that he's left comedy behind because it's impossible to be funny in a woke world, but there are still remnants of his trademark sense of humour. The scene in which Arthur is visited by Randall and Gary (Leigh Gill) to inform him that the police have been asking questions turns ugly as Arthur stabs Randall then beats him to death. But the scene pivots towards jet-black comedy as Gary, whom Arthur lets live, can't flee from the apartment because he's too short to reach the door chain. It's a scenario that wouldn't have looked out of place in *Old School* but with an added layer of darkness that typifies *Joker*'s neatly juggled different tones.

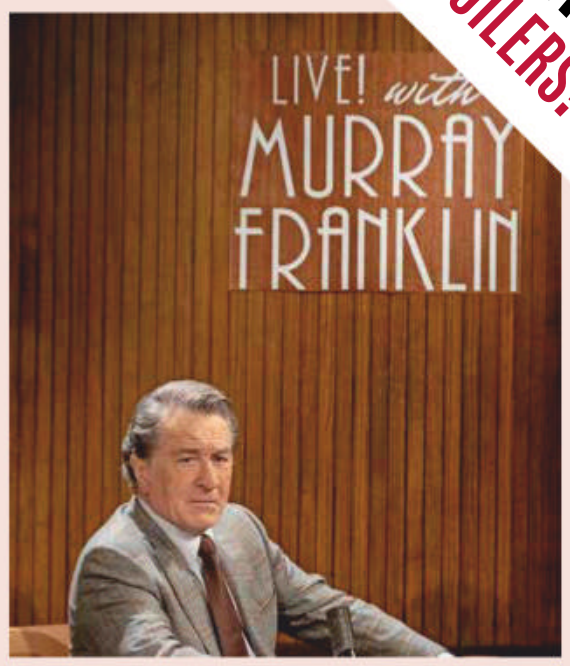


8 ROCK AND ROLL PART 2

Ian Freer: This may be Arthur's victory dance but Phillips adds another layer of creep by scoring it to Gary Glitter's 'Rock And Roll Part 2'. The song is a banger but an uncomfortable one. It's an act of epic trolling worthy of Joker himself.

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Above: TV host Murray Franklin (Robert De Niro). **Main:** Cracked actor: Joker makes his entrance. **Below:** his final resting place, the Arkham State Hospital.

9 JOKER AND MURRAY FRANKLIN

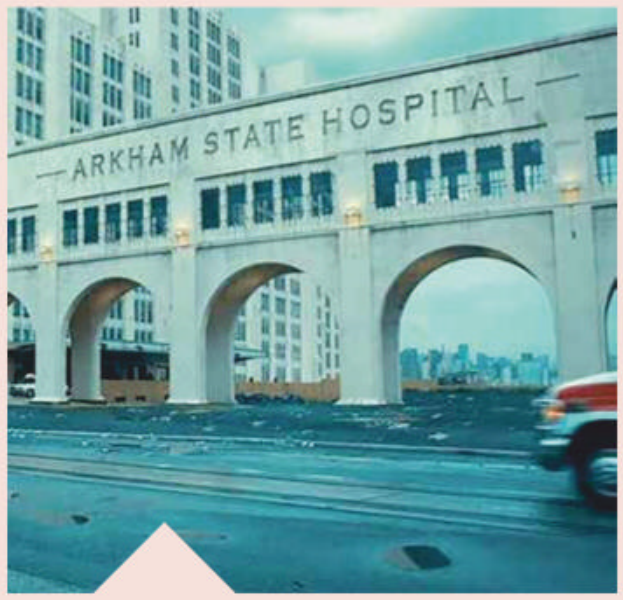
Todd Phillips: Our movie has a little bit about the need for television. That need for adulation, the need to be recognised and seen and stop being invisible. That's why so many people end up on television in whatever reality show. That need to feel like you're part of something.

Ian Freer: In some ways, *Joker*'s fascination with the effects of television echoes a '70s flick like *Network*. There's a shot of multiple TV screens, each relaying footage of prior violence that reeks of Sidney Lumet's film. Yet the scene itself has further echoes. Arthur comes on dancing to the show, fully his Joker persona, settles in his chair and, after admitting he killed the Wayne Enterprises employees, shoots Murray (Robert De Niro) in the face for laughing at his stand-up. For some, the moment has its roots in Frank Miller's 1986 *The Dark Knight Returns* where he goes on the David Endocrine Show to prove his sanity and then kills the host and audience with Joker gas. Still, whatever, the references, the shooting of Murray remains shocking.

Todd Phillips: It was intimidating, to say the least, to kill Robert De Niro. First of all, I don't want to see Robert De Niro get killed. I love him more than anybody, he's my favourite actor of all time. That's not something to take lightly. It's a lot to do that. But De Niro understood what we were going for, understood the script, we didn't surprise him on the day. It was intimidating to meet him because I'm such a fan. I know so many of his movies inside and out. I truly remember them better than he does. When you make them, how many times does he really watch them? So I had to get over that quickly. But it wasn't lost on me that, "Oh my God, Jake LaMotta is sitting in that chair?" Then I've got Joaquin in the other chair. It was surreal. But you get over it pretty quick. It's something I won't soon forget.

Ian Freer: There are lots of online theories that posit De Niro's Murray Franklin is actually an older version of Rupert Pupkin, De Niro's character from *The King Of Comedy*, under a pseudonym. If there's little that gives it credence — Phillips has categorically denied it — *Joker* certainly keys into the awkwardness, desperation and delusional quality of Pupkin's character. The latter's catch-phrase — "It's better to be king for a night than schmuck for a lifetime" — is a veritable tag-line for Arthur Fleck's life.

Todd Phillips: On the Murray show he is living the life he feels like he was meant to live, which is to be a psychopath [*laughs*], but at least he's free.



10 ARTHUR IN ARKHAM

Todd Phillips: To me, the only time Arthur truly laughs in the movie is when he is with the woman in Arkham State Hospital. She says, "What's so funny?" He says, "You wouldn't get it," talking about the joke. That's his only genuine laugh as Arthur. That was the intention. At that point he's free. The movie is very much about walking around with a mask on. Only in taking off that mask is he fully free, which is ironic because the Joker has a mask on. And that laugh in Arkham State Hospital is meant to represent that.

Alamy, Getty Images, Landmark

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Hustlers



1 RAMONA TAKES THE STAGE

Lorene Scafaria: That was the most nervous I've been during the entire shoot. In the script originally, I didn't know what the capabilities were of whoever was going to be Ramona so it just says, "Ramona does one final flourish." Then Jennifer came aboard and threw herself into it. My DP, Todd Banhazl, and I didn't see the dance until two weeks before we shot. It took a minute to get our jaws off the ground. Once we did, we thought, "Okay, how do we shoot this like the stunt that it is? And how do we shoot it like the live event that it is?" We were thinking of *Raging Bull*, and wanted to give her those boxer-entering-the-ring vibes. We basically applied the sense of control that runs through the movie in the visual storytelling. We're obviously seeing the effect that Ramona's having on Destiny, as she's seeing this woman wielding her power, and then we also wanted to be onstage with Ramona, to really feel how intoxicating that is, and then we also wanted to feel what it was like to be the audience, to be taken over by her. So it felt like Ramona is in control of where the camera went. By the way it was [shot on] my birthday! I'll never have another party like that for the rest of my life.



2 UP ON THE ROOF

Main: She works hard for the money: J-Lo as Ramona.
Above: Ramona counsels Destiny (Constance Wu).

Lorene Scafaria: I like that you're not sure about [Ramona] yet, that she's this enigmatic figure at that point, yet she is so warm and maternal here. I love that those characters can have that immediate intimacy that I think the dancers tend to have, and that women tend to have in general. To see Destiny be lonely and isolated before that and not have that physical contact and then be invited into Jennifer Lopez' fur coat, you feel like you'd follow her anywhere after that. By then it was May 2nd, our last night, but when that [bikini] is all you have on underneath, you kinda need the coat! It was not a warm night. I remember being bundled up myself. We shot for only 29 days. It rained for 26 or 27 of those days, and somehow we just got so lucky with it raining when we wanted it and not raining when we needed it to. We were truly blessed.





3 LIZZO

Helen O'Hara: If you've been paying any attention at all to modern music you'll know that Lizzo is one of the biggest stars in the world right now. It's not yet clear if this near-cameo suggests that she has an interest in acting, but someone should sign her up for a musical romcom immediately.



5 WHERE THE MEN AT?

Helen O'Hara: If you're looking for peak male entitlement, look no further than the *New Yorker* review which thought that the film might have been better had it spent less time on female friendships and more on relationships involving men: some of the clients at the club, perhaps. The film fails a reverse Bechdel test: the only time we hear men talking to each other, they're talking about these women. But that is a rare feat rather than an everyday occurrence, so if any men are feeling victimised by not being central to the narrative, ask a nearby woman for help on how to cope.

Lorene Scafaria: Even though we've seen so many things in strip clubs in movies, there's so few from the dancers' perspective, so I thought this story was an incredible way to talk about capitalism and the economy and as it relates to gender, and our value system, which is truly broken. I was surprised how difficult it was to get the movie made. When you have male characters doing questionable and criminal acts it doesn't seem to be that difficult for people to wrap their heads around it, but I really felt that people weren't judging where the characters end up; they were judging where they started from. It did feel that [the movie] was wrapped up in the stigma that these dancers faced in life, strippers and sex workers, so I felt like we were off to the wrong start for people, out of the gate. I'm glad to see it resonate so much because to me it felt incredibly relatable.

Getty Images, Landmark



4 THE INTERVIEW

Lorene Scafaria: The framing device [of the article] was my original pitch for it. In earlier drafts we saw Ramona's interview earlier, and it was almost a little more combative because you felt these two different versions of the story, but this didn't want to be that. It really wanted to be Destiny trying to control her narrative, to be understood. That's a theme in my work, and in my life, a great need to feel understood. I also wanted that relationship between Destiny and Elizabeth, Julia [Stiles'] character, to be two women of a similar age but who grew up in different houses and had different hands of cards. Julia's a bit of a stand-in for the audience, so I felt like that was really important to have these two women sit together and talk, and realise that in another life they could have been sitting in the opposite chairs.

Clockwise from above: Julia Stiles as journalist Jennifer; Annabelle (Lili Reinhart) reels in a mark.





6 USHER

Lorene Scafaria: I wrote Usher into the script. I just couldn't picture anybody but him. It was to be this celebration, this high point, so we had to blow it out. I didn't want any green in the movie other than money, but I told Todd [Banhazl] to get the green lasers out. [Usher] seemed really onboard with it. His only hang-up was wondering if he could look the same as he did, and of course he hasn't changed at all. We got all the girls onstage and it brought a tear to my eye, I'm not gonna lie, to see all of them up onstage together dancing just felt like a beautiful Renaissance painting. I remember Jennifer saying to [stripping consultant] Jacqueline Francis, "How would you treat a guy like this?" and Jacq said, "You'd act like he's nothing; you might ask him his name." So Jennifer ad-libbed that during I think take one and he responded, so we isolated that moment because it was just too good.

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FOUR DECADES AFTER *STAR WARS* BEGAN, J.J. ABRAMS HAS RETURNED TO USHER IN THE SERIES' FINAL ACT. WITH NEW HEROES EMERGING AND OLD FAVOURITES RETURNING, EMPIRE TALKS TO THE CAST OF THE RISE OF SKYWALKER TO FIND OUT HOW THEY BROUGHT THE SAGA HOME WORDS **JAMES DYER**

THE LAST ALLIANCE

HOW THE HELL DO YOU END STAR WARS?

After eight core films, 42 years and a single story that has shaped the childhoods of three generations, placing a worthy capstone on something so colossal is no trivial task. For J.J. Abrams, concluding the franchise he'd worshipped since childhood was never going to be a case of simply placing a full stop, tipping his hat and waving goodbye. So long, and thanks for all the Sith.

Abrams' has been a task more daunting by far: to create one great film that wraps up three films, while being a worthy climax to nine films, which just happen to make up the most famous series in history. How do you tackle a proposition of such magnitude?

The answer, it turned out, was simpler than he imagined. With a little help from co-writer Chris Terrio, Abrams looked back at the entire saga and took the story back to basics. Because beneath the Republic politics, separatist factions and taxation of trade routes, *Star Wars*, at its core, is extremely simple: a primal story of good versus evil.

All it needed was a crucible: a challenge so overwhelming it would make this final showdown a conflict for the ages.

"We were sitting outside a hotel in London and J.J. just laid the story out over an hour-and-a-half," recalls Daisy Ridley. "I had to go away and take it all in. Later, I emailed him and said, 'Sorry, can I just check? Did you *actually* say this is happening?'"

ORIGINALLY, IT WAS all going to end with midi-chlorians. Those ineffable, inexplicable microbes that impregnated Shmi Skywalker, enthralled Qui-Gon Jinn and flummoxed fans when they were introduced in *The Phantom Menace* came within a Wookiee hair's breadth of being the real stars of *Episode IX*.

When George Lucas gift-wrapped the *Star Wars* universe and presented it to Disney in 2012, he did so with a bow on top. That bow was the treatment for a new trilogy, one that would round off the whole saga and bring his iconic characters back for a final curtain call.

It was a mouth-watering prospect for the studio — one worth spending $4.05 billion on, in fact — but, like a pair of argyle socks unwrapped on Christmas morning, Disney's present, once opened, wasn't quite what they had hoped for.

"[The next three *Star Wars* films] were going to get into a microbiotic world," Lucas explained last year to James Cameron in the latter's *Story Of Science Fiction* TV series. "There's this world of creatures that operate differently than we do. I call them the Whills. And the Whills are the ones who actually control the universe. They feed off the Force ...and the conduit is the midi-chlorians."

Lucas' triumphant finale, it turned out, was a gonzo tale of symbiosis and pseudo-science, in which his all-powerful 'Whills' rode around inside Jedi-like tiny hitchhikers ("We're vessels for them!"). Unsurprisingly, the treatment was politely accepted by incoming Lucasfilm president Kathleen Kennedy and placed quietly in a drawer, never to be spoken of again. Where there's a Whill, it seems, there's just no way.

In its place, J.J. Abrams constructed *The Force Awakens* (2015), beginning a new chapter in the story, one that continued with Rian Johnson's *The Last Jedi* (2017) and, on 19 December this year, will reach its conclusion with *The Rise Of Skywalker*. To end the story, Abrams and Terrio found their inspiration not by delving into a microbiotic world, but by doing what *Star Wars* does best and pitting a band of plucky heroes against an implacable foe.

The great conflagration they dreamed up will see Rey and Kylo Ren duel atop the sea-swept wreckage of the second Death Star, and (in a big win for the internet's 'Bendemptionist' contingent) seemingly working together to smash Darth Vader's charred remains. Where Johnson teased us with Kylo's possible return to the light, before having him double down on darkness, we might yet see the one-time Ben Solo come in from the cold.

"From my first meeting with J.J. about *Star Wars*, he told me an overall arc for Kylo's character," says Adam Driver. "He didn't know how the three movies would end at that point, but by the start of the third movie he had explained a journey that was an exciting idea for me to think about. A testament to J.J. and Chris Terrio's writing on this one, I think, is that how Kylo's journey has evolved isn't explained in text, but hopefully it's felt."

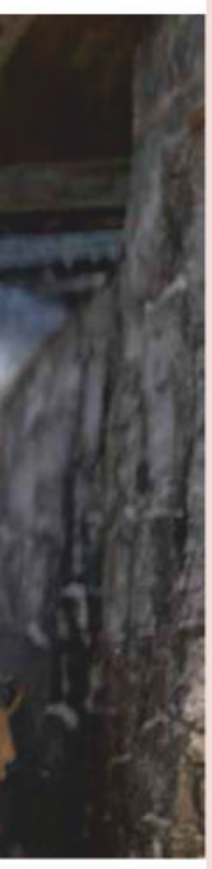
There's far more at stake in *The Rise Of Skywalker* than



Right: Finn (John Boyega) and Jannah (Naomi Ackie) brave the high seas of Kef Bir. **Below:** The masked and mysterious Zorii Bliss, played by Keri Russell.







one man's soul, however. Another presence permeates this final film, one hinted at by imagery in the trailer: the ominous, stone-hewn throne, ripped straight out of the late Ralph McQuarrie's original artwork for *Return Of The Jedi*; Imperial Star Destroyers rising from an icy tomb; the shocking appearance of a dark-side Rey, complete with crimson lightsaber. Yes, he's back. The saga's ultimate villain: Senator Sheev Palpatine. Darth Sidious. The Emperor.

"As soon as I read the first page of the script I was sucked in," says John Boyega. "When I got to [the Emperor], I was just like, 'Come on, man!' Like, 'Bloody hell, we needed a villain the whole fucking franchise. Well, now we got one!'" Of his own reaction, Driver merely says, "Pure excitement."

The precise nature of Palpatine's return remains a matter of conjecture, but given the amount of old Empire hardware on display and Ian McDiarmid's ominous voiceover in the trailer ("Long have I waited!"), it would be foolish to write his inclusion off as a vision or dream. Behind Hux, Ren, Snoke and the entire The First Order, we may well discover that the Galactic Empire's overlord has been secretly pulling the strings.

"It's an incredible feeling of, 'Oh shit, this has been a long game being played by the Sith and the Jedi,'" says Oscar Isaac. "It's like an epic galactic chess match that's been going on since way back when. And now it's all finally starting to make sense."

AS THE LATE Supreme Leader Snoke was fond of saying, before his unfortunate bisection: "Darkness rises, and the light to meet it." Fittingly, with the threat level now set to deep Sith, the Resistance is hiring, beginning with a recruitment drive on the ocean moon of Kef Bir.

With its brooding thunderheads and roiling swell, Kef Bir is the final resting place of the second Death Star's rusting carcass. After the Emperor's super-weapon was obliterated at the end of *Return Of The Jedi*, the shattered hull fell to earth here, amid the satellite's crashing waves. The moon, however, hosts more than just the space station's ruined dome; it's also home to Jannah, one of *Episode IX*'s new additions.

"Aw, mate, Jannah is super-cool!" exclaims Naomi Ackie. "I mean, you can't shake your head at someone who can ride a horse and shoot a bow and arrow at the same time, right?"

Leader of one of the moon's equestrian warrior tribes, Ackie's freedom fighter has a line in natty yellow capes that would put Lando's to shame. There's even talk that the ›

character may have sprung directly from the old smoothie's loins ("Lando's a charming man, he could have children all over the universe!" stonewalls Ackie). What we do know is that, armed with a plasma-flinging space bow and sat astride an orbak (the shaggy steeds seen galloping across the hull of a Star Destroyer in the trailer), Jannah cuts quite the dashing figure.

"Jannah's story links her up with the characters in a really interesting way," teases Ackie. "She has her own back story, which makes her very invested in the fight. She has this fierce warrior nature, but a soft centre. There's a part of her that is seeking connection with people, trying to build a family."

Also swelling the insurgency's ranks is the porn-star-monikered Zorii Bliss. Hailing from the ice planet Kijimi, this miscreant is leader of the planet's resident black-marketeers, the Spice Runners, and is played by Abrams' former *Felicity*, Keri Russell.

"He literally just texted me one day: 'Can you call me? Do you wanna be in *Star Wars*?'" Russell remembers. "I was getting coffee at my little shop. I dropped my bike and was like, 'Ah, I gotta call someone. Bye!' He pitched me the idea for the character and I was like, 'I'm totally in.'"

A ghost from Poe Dameron's past, Bliss is a potential source of frustration for hopeful Poe-Finn shippers, but her look is a direct throwback to Abrams' formative years. "There was this female character when J.J. was young — I think it was in *Speed Racer* or something," says Russell. "She rode a motorbike and had this helmet. He goes, 'I could never see her face and I was always obsessed with what she looked like.' That was the genesis of this character, because he always wanted to know who she was."

Russell's interstellar Stig is aligned to neither Resistance nor First Order, but falls through the cracks in-between. She is, Russell emphasises, a criminal first and foremost, with little regard for the distinction between right and wrong and a history of screwing people over, which may not bode well for her new Resistance house guests. "Even her costume speaks to the world in which she lives — it's not an accident she's completely covered. It's a physical armour but it also tells you who she is. She's tough, she's acerbic and I love the exchanges between her and Poe. Is she always for the group? Probably not. She's probably for herself. The main thing is she's a survivor and isn't afraid to get a little dirty."

Throw in BB-8's new wingman — a diminutive rollerdroid called D/O, resembling a megaphone riding a unicycle — and pocket-sized mechanic Babu Frik, and the Resistance, depleted when last we saw them, is now restocked and ready to rock.

Poe Dameron's spark, that will light the fire to burn the First Order down, is now a healthy blaze. ›



Red alert: Sith troopers go into battle.



"Everyone comes together and *boom!* The adventure is on," declares Isaac with a whoop. After two films spent scattered across the galaxy, the stars of *The Rise Of Skywalker* are enjoying some shared screentime at last. "Plus, I'm getting out of the cockpit in this one. We're getting Poe in some special forces gear and on the ground!"

For a character originally intended to die in the first 20 minutes of *The Force Awakens*, the former flyboy has come a long way since he was first introduced. Charming, funny, yet ill-defined, Dameron didn't come into his own until Rian Johnson placed him centrestage in *The Last Jedi*. And in *Episode IX* he's not the only character rediscovering their groove: from Boyega's Finn, who spent much of the last adventure sidelined ("I finally got to be the Finn that I always wanted to be from the end of *Episode VII*!"), to the mighty Chewbacca, who returns to the front lines after a film spent largely wrangling Porgs.

Now united, Chewie, Finn, Poe and Rey will tackle the final furlong together, for better or worse. Alongside them are Threepio, Artoo, BB-8 and Kelly Marie Tran's Rose Tico, whose near-death at the end of *The Last Jedi* has, she explains, only deepened her resolve.

"She's been through a lot," says Tran. "Her arc through the last film was learning that she could play a real part in this thing that she thought she wasn't good enough to be in. I feel like I've had a similar experience."

Abrams' faith in his cast is clear. Despite the monolithic task at hand, the director returned to *Star Wars* with new confidence, keeping the shoot loose and informal from day one. Inspired by reshoots with Isaac on *The Force Awakens* (Poe's interrogation banter with Kylo Ren being largely improvised), the director encouraged his actors to play with the material this time around, trusting them to find the beats, while sitting back and letting the cameras roll.

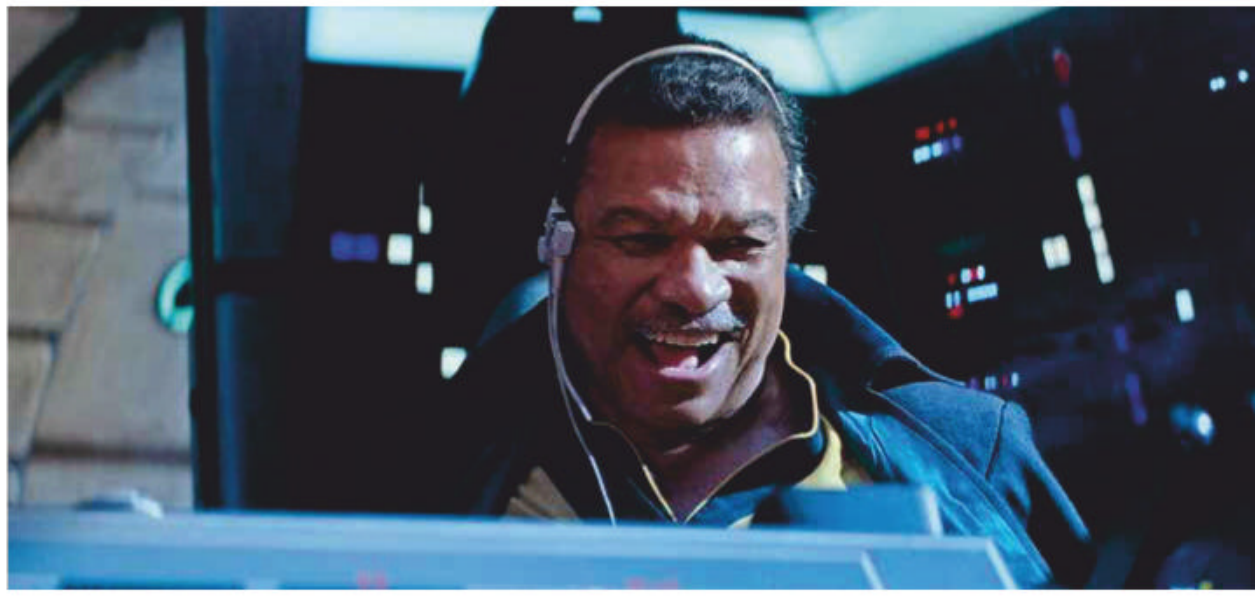
"J.J. came back with a sick new energy," confirms Boyega. "We'd do these long, continuous shots and he's like, 'More dialogue, make it messy.' We're, like, on this big studio film going, 'More messy? Okay, we'll give it to you then!' It was so much fun."

Lando Calrissian has also returned to lend a dapper hand, with Billy Dee Williams back after 36 years, in the hope, he says, of redeeming the wily scoundrel once and for all.

"After *Empire Strikes Back* I used to pick my daughter up from school and have all these kids yelling at me," he recalls with some exasperation. "It was crazy! It was the same thing on airlines: the stewardess would come up and say, 'You betrayed Han Solo!' I'm sitting there going, 'Wait, wait, wait, let me try and explain.' So I'm finally down to, 'Did anybody die? No. Nobody died.'"

Even C-3P0 has an amped-up role — although it did result in Anthony Daniels



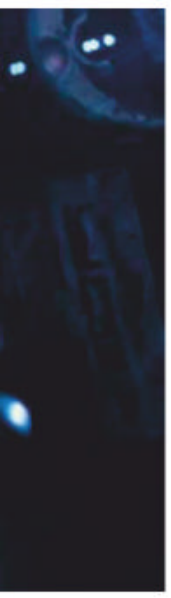






Top to bottom: Rey (Daisy Ridley) and Kylo Ren (Adam Driver) survey the wreckage of the second Death Star; Lando Calrissian (Billy Dee Williams) is back in the game; C-3PO (Anthony Daniels) gets an upgrade, courtesy of droidsmith Babu Frik; Kylo Ren faces down Rey atop the Death Star wreckage.









being left out in a Wadi Rum sandstorm ("An hour passed and there I am, literally being sandblasted!"). 'Upgraded' by droidsmith Babu Frik, the stammering protocol droid will finally get the chance to raise some hell, not only wielding Chewie's bowcaster, but sporting ominous, Terminator-red eyes that lend old Goldenrod a killer new game face.

"In *The Last Jedi* I became a table decoration, which I regretted, because Threepio was worth more than that," Daniels says with a sigh. "But he does all sorts of weird stuff in this one. It was a delight, a joy! I get to go out on a high. This is my third ending and I think I'll be saddest about this one. *Return Of The Jedi* was...well, it had the Ewoks in it, for God's sake!"

CARRIE FISHER'S 2016 memoir, *The Princess Diarist*, is notable for a number of reasons. Its intimate description of the then 19-year-old's affair with co-star Harrison Ford is one. That it was Fisher's final work before her sudden death a month after publication is, tragically, another. The third is a curious acknowledgement found on the book's final page.

"J.J. Abrams," it reads, "for putting up with me twice."

Having only worked with Abrams on *The Force Awakens*, it was a peculiar note for the author to end on, and one the director himself is at a loss to explain. But 12 months later, when Abrams was approached to take control of *Star Wars* once again, Fisher's cryptic sign-off became strangely prescient. *Episode VII* had been Harrison Ford's movie, while *VIII* had given Mark Hamill a chance to shine. *IX*, however, had always been intended as Fisher's film. The plucky princess who stared down Darth Vader all those years ago, now a general, was supposed to lead the final charge. Abrams was adamant that she still get the chance.

Gathering unused footage from the previous two movies, he found, amid the off-cuts and deleted scenes, enough material to finish Leia's story and, however indirectly, to work with Fisher for a second time.

"Her writing that in her book was the first thing J.J. told me. It's eerie," recalls Ridley. "Watching the scenes with Carrie is strange and those little moments are quite upsetting. But she's also great in the footage — she really is. And where this was supposed to be her film, in some ways it really *is* her film. It all just makes sense in a strange way."

After all, who could be more important to include in *Star Wars*' final farewell than the former princess whose desperate flight from the Empire had started it all? Because what Abrams understood when he made *The Rise Of Skywalker* is that *Star Wars* has always been, first and foremost, about people. It's the series' humanity, not its midi-chlorians, that captured the imagination of millions. And the force behind its Force springs not from Whills, but from Leia and Luke and Han, and now Rey, Finn and Poe as well. It's *Star Wars*' characters that have made this series endure, and that will bring the saga home.

"Working on these films ended up being everything I hoped it would be," reflects Isaac. "All my time with Carrie Fisher, getting to hang out with one of the last true rebels. And between me and J.J. and Boyega, there was just so much laughing, so much stupid fun we had together. I can close this chapter feeling really happy about the whole thing, but it's not strange to say goodbye. It feels right." Adam Driver feels the same way: "[The film] has the responsibility of not only tying up the two before it, but the six before that, and have it feel complete. J.J. and Chris Terrio nailed it."

It is, as Luke said so ominously in *Episode VIII*, time for the Jedi to end. The conclusion of the Skywalker Saga marks the end point of a long and winding journey, one that has spilled over into countless aspects of modern life. From its incalculable impact on fiction, to an official Jedi religion (just check the census) and its help in the naming of everything from Ronald Reagan's missile shield to a dozen different species of animal (the *aptostichus sarlacc* spider might not digest you over a thousand years, but it can give a nasty bite), *Star Wars*' influence is indelible.

Because the thing about ending *Star Wars* is that it doesn't really end at all. While this story will finish, the universe lives on and, just as new stories will emerge across films, shows, books and games, these nine films and the tale they tell will endure.

"There's just nothing else like it," smiles Isaac. "They're more than just movies. *Star Wars* speaks to people in a way that nothing else does. We don't all believe in God, but we all believe in Luke Skywalker."

Amen.

***STAR WARS: THE RISE OF SKYWALKER* IS IN CINEMAS FROM 19 DECEMBER**

IMPERIAL MEASUREMENTS

WITH THE EMPEROR BACK FOR *EPISODE IX*, HERE'S A SLIDING SCALE OF HIS EVIL TO DATE



DARTH SIDIOUS

AS SEEN IN: STAR WARS: EPISODE III — REVENGE OF THE SITH

At a weird, floaty, blobby opera, Palpatine spins Anakin 'The Tragedy Of Darth Plagueis The Wise', a tale of a Sith Lord with the power to cheat death, sneakily playing on Anakin's insecurities about keeping Padmé alive. A master of manipulation at work.



DARTH SNEAKY

AS SEEN IN: STAR WARS REBELS — 'FAMILY REUNION — AND FAREWELL'

Afraid of Ezra's threat to the Empire, Palpatine, in *Episode I* hologram form, presents himself as a kindly presence, showing the Force-sensitive rebel a vision of his dead parents and promising he can join them. Ezra sees through his plan and Palpatine reveals his true colours, ordering his Guard to destroy the boy.



DARTH DICKHEAD

AS SEEN IN: STAR WARS: EPISODE VI — RETURN OF THE JEDI

Palps once again gets inside someone's head, turning Luke to the dark side before our very eyes by throwing shade on the Alliance and his mates to fuel his anger. "Strike me down with all of your hatred, and your journey towards the dark side will be complete." And, of course, Luke bites.



DARTH DASTARDLY

AS SEEN IN: STAR WARS: THE CLONE WARS — 'THE LAWLESS'

Cartoon Palps goes to Mandalore to confront his former apprentice Darth Maul. A lightsaber battle begins between Palpatine, Maul and Maul's brother Savage Opress, the Emperor-in-waiting easily killing Opress and then overpowering Maul. After a quick bout of torture, he tells the tomato-headed Sith, "Don't worry I'm not going to kill you. I have 'other' uses for you."



DARTH DIABOLICAL

AS SEEN IN: STAR WARS: EPISODE III — REVENGE OF THE SITH

Battling with Mace Windu, Palpatine is beaten, his face practically melted, but is saved from execution by Anakin. Sealing the deal, Palpatine unleashes Force lightning in Windu's face, shouting, "Power! Unlimited Power!" He later mugs Anakin off by telling the new Sith Lord he killed his wife Padmé in anger. Altogether now: *"Noooooooooooo!"* **IAN FREER**



ERSION

WORDS **JAMES DYER**



Main: Director J.J. Abrams returns to *Star Wars* to wrap up the iconic series. **Right:** Finn (John Boyega), Poe Dameron (Oscar Isaac) and Rey (Daisy Ridley) in *The Rise Of Skywalker*.

"WE'RE TRYING TO EXCAVATE WHAT IS INEVITABLE."

J.J. ABRAMS ON RETURNING TO THE PILOT'S CHAIR AND BRINGING THE SAGA HOME

How much of this story was conceived back when you and Lawrence Kasdan wrote *The Force Awakens*?
We had a loose plan of where it would go, but we were focusing on *Episode VII* and I couldn't do that for *VIII* and *IX* as well. While I was prepping and then shooting *VII*, Kathy brought on Rian, who's a director I admire enormously. He read our script, he looked at what we had shot, and he went off and did his thing. What he wrote in no way undermined what I was thinking the ending would be.

What was your writing process on this one?
Chris Terrio and I started talking about the broad ideas I'd had from the beginning, things that we had inherited, and things about the saga. This whole trilogy was always meant to be a continuum, a part of the larger nine films, so the inclusion of existing characters, revisiting certain themes — that was all sort of built in. Ending it all was a combination of knowing what felt right and approaching it with humility. To ask, "What is it that the characters can tell us? What does the story want to be?" Not, "How do we force this thing into being?" My dream is that a kid watches these nine movies together and he or she sees this inevitable, undeniable trajectory. And hopefully it also has some things they would not expect!

What was the primary thought in your mind when you first put fingers to keyboard?
I think it's often a mistake in sequels to assume anyone cares about the main character. A lot of sequels I've seen have done this weird thing where they don't do any work to re-establish the character. Despite what you'll see in some of her abilities, there has to be a challenge for Rey: there has to be a piece missing, an uncertainty. The thing about *Star Wars* that inspired me as a kid was the possibility of what you can do despite the conditions. How, when faced with something ›

like what these characters are faced with, do you possibly start to push back against something so nightmarish and terrifying?

Rian Johnson said writing Kylo Ren was the highlight of *The Last Jedi*. Would you agree?
I love writing for this guy. Partly because I feel like his [inner] conflict is a relatable thing. I find that most bullies are just sad, really. They're trying to fill a hole inside them. And I feel like that's Kylo Ren's thing. His temper tantrums and his inability to control himself, his joining the Knights Of Ren and leading them — clearly this guy is looking for some meaning and connection. And yes, he's the bad guy and he's doing evil things, but he's the son of two of the heroes. He's the nightmare of that couple. Clearly his having done what he did to his father is something that doesn't go away. And I think "kill the past", that mantra he had in *VIII*, was very much his not wanting to look back. It's too painful. That's part of what we explore in this movie.

At what point did you decide to bring back Lando Calrissian?
From the very beginning. The idea of this trilogy was to be a continuation of the two that had preceded [it], which is to say that these characters exist, they live in this galaxy and their history is the movies we've seen. So experiences would be coloured by the legends of some of these characters, the stories they've told. The idea that General Calrissian wouldn't be known, I mean, that would be ridiculous. He would be legendary. I loved that when you first meet Rey on Jakku she's not even sure that Luke is a real person, and by the end of that story there she is face to face with him, asking him to please join the fight. I wish I'd been able to do Rey training with Luke in *VII*. I wish that we'd gotten to bring Lando in. I wish all sorts of things. But I was thrilled that Lando hadn't come back, because we got to bring him back.

Looking back at where you started, are you surprised now when you see where you ended up?
Sometimes there were things that made you gasp, "Oh my God, don't you see what this means?" Or, "Holy shit, look at the symmetry of that!" But, weirdly, even some of the things that happen in *Episode VIII* that at the time I thought, "Oh, that's an interesting choice I would not have made," weirdly ended up being beneficial for this film. I feel like we're doing the best we can to sort of excavate what is inevitable. Some of the things I like the most wouldn't have happened if I had to make all those decisions back when we were doing *VII*. Certain things that happened in Rian's film, and certainly all the films that preceded *VII*, were all inspiration for the cocktail that became *Rise Of Skywalker*.







Here: *Rise Of Skywalker* screenwriter Chris Terrio: **Top:** Kylo Ren (Adam Driver) on the rampage in *Star Wars*' swansong.

"WE AGONISED, WE GRAPPLED, WE HAD SLEEPLESS NIGHTS."

SCREENWRITER CHRIS TERRIO REVEALS WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE HANDED THE KEYS TO THE GALAXY

How much of the story was left up to you and J.J., and how much was preordained by the time you came on board?
Well, there were some general guidelines for where the story might go, feelings about the arcs that J.J. had wanted the characters to have right from *Episode VII*. But there was free reign in the particulars of the story. You would think that with the keys to such an expensive and beloved vehicle you'd be micromanaged, but it wasn't [like that]. And I think that's a testament to the amount of faith that Kathy Kennedy and the studio have in J.J.. They really said, "Take it where you think it needs to go." And then of course we agonised and we changed our minds and we grappled and we had sleepless nights and we argued and [did] every possible thing that should happen in a collaboration. Especially a collaboration for something that needs to close out the Skywalker Saga.

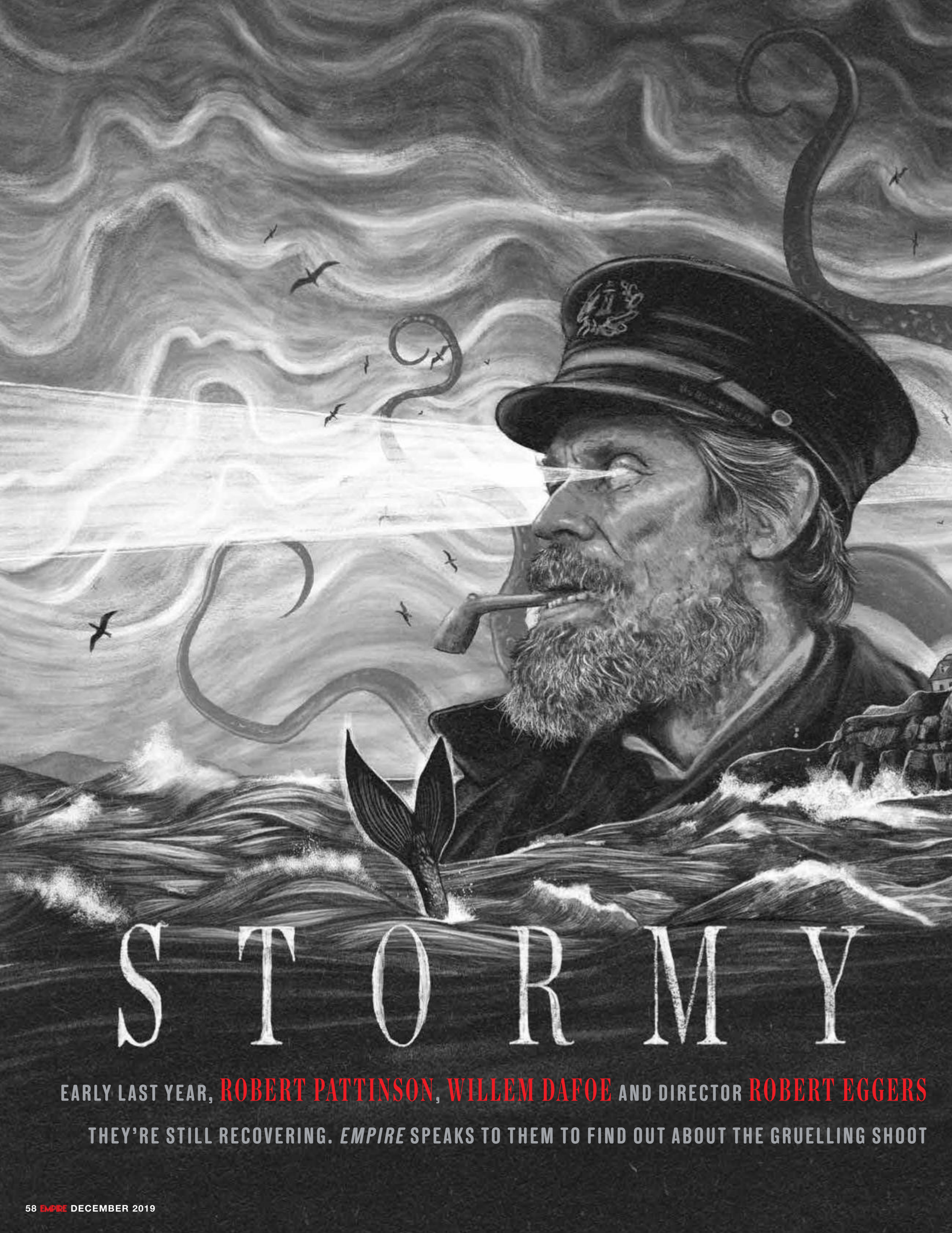
Was there one idea that started the process?
There were two, really. One of them is a simple one: "Who is Rey?" Which is a question people not only wonder about quite literally, but wonder about in the spiritual sense. How can Rey become the spiritual heir to the Jedi? We kept coming back to, "Who is Rey?" and how can we give the most satisfying answer to that not only factually — because obviously people are interested in whether there's more to be learned of Rey's story — but more importantly, who is she as a character? How will she find the courage and will and inner strength and power to carry on what she's inherited? The second one is, "How strong is the Force?" It sounds a little simple but, actually, when you get down to it, that is a sort of Zen koan that we would really meditate on — not literally in yoga poses or anything, but we would discuss, "What is the Force and how strong is the Force?" Those two things were really important. But then also, how do we find in the past that which we'll need for the future? That's what Rey, Finn and Poe are thinking about. How do we reach back to what we've inherited and create something new that uses what came before?

***The Last Jedi* polarised fans. Why do you think that was?**
Star Wars fans are passionate about what they love. The remarkable thing about *Star Wars* [films] is that they feel like they're just for you. And so I think inevitably when you have a new episode, there are gonna be people that really respond to what's being done, especially if there are new ideas being put forward. And there are also people who won't respond as much. Everyone's gonna have their own version of *Star Wars*. I hope people argue over ours!

The early films are quite binary in their depiction of light and dark sides, where this trilogy is more ambiguous. Is that something you embraced?
Yes, because I think Kylo Ren is one of the most complex characters, if not the most complex, that's ever appeared in the *Star Wars* universe. With Vader, it was very hard to see that there was a war going on inside him between the light and dark 'til quite late in *Return Of The Jedi*. I think in the case of Kylo Ren, right from the time of *Episode VII*, J.J. was suggesting that Ren was very uneasy about his relationship with the light or dark side. In his conversation with his father in *Episode VII*, he quite bluntly stated that he was being torn apart. In Kylo Ren alone you have sort of a complex depiction of the war that goes on inside all of us. We're not all good, then suddenly we're all bad. And we're not all bad, then suddenly all good. And I hope that *Episode IX* picks that up in interesting ways. Rey has been tempted by the dark side in many different ways, and Ren has been tempted by the light.

Is one of the fun elements of working on this the chance to move the galaxy on a little and introduce new aspects of the mythology?
Oh, absolutely. One of the things that helped me when we were writing is instead of thinking we need to make up a story, I would tell myself we're just writing the history of the galaxy as best we can tell it. And so when we come up with an idea for a new world, a new development in the First Order, a new development in the Resistance, we tried to write it as though this is just what happened. As if we were making a historical epic that happened to be set in a galaxy far, far away.

***STAR WARS: THE RISE OF SKYWALKER* IS IN CINEMAS FROM 19 DECEMBER**



STORMY

EARLY LAST YEAR, ROBERT PATTINSON, WILLEM DAFOE AND DIRECTOR ROBERT EGGERS THEY'RE STILL RECOVERING. *EMPIRE* SPEAKS TO THEM TO FIND OUT ABOUT THE GRUELLING SHOOT



WATERS

ARRIVED ON A PIECE OF VOLCANIC ROCK TO SHOOT THEIR CRAZED PSYCHODRAMA THE LIGHTHOUSE. BEHIND ONE OF THE MOST STARTLING FILMS IN YEARS

WORDS **ALEX GODFREY** • ILLUSTRATIONS **PETER STRAIN**

IT WAS SUPPOSED to be a small film. Some vindictive seagulls and a mermaid aside, it was primarily two men in a lighthouse, toiling, squabbling, drinking, mentally unravelling. After the success of his debut film *The Witch*, director Robert Eggers was juggling ideas for a follow-up and threw this into the mix: a cheaper, contained little drama. Or so he thought. Nothing about this startling slice of lunacy was small, at all. And nothing was easy.

"It was a little bit more challenging than I expected," says Eggers, meeting *Empire* in London. "I knew that it was going to be challenging, and I also knew that it was going to be more challenging than I could understand. And it was even a little bit more challenging than that." He laughs, looking back at a production that was almost as demented off-screen as it is on. This, then, is the story of *The Lighthouse*, where, off-camera, the puking was kind of intentional and the crying wasn't at all.

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"IT'S JUST THE rats," the director comments as we sit down, some ominous creaking going on beneath the floor. Eggers may be right — we're in a posh hotel, but this is London where, they say, you're never more than six feet away from a rat. Ye olde London is still here, if you look for it, which Eggers has been doing during his stay, particularly enthusing about his candle-lit visit to Dennis Severs' House, the East End's immersive recreation of an 18th century dwelling. "It's one of my favourite places I've ever been to," he says. "Things just recede into the shadows and you have to use your imagination."

He may as well be talking about *The Lighthouse*. Eggers is fascinated with the past; the dead, he says, speak to him more loudly than the future. He grew up in New England, where *The Witch* and *The Lighthouse* are both set, and where folklore is strong. "The lighthouses out there have a mystery and a romance to them," he explains. "I thought about that as a kid." In 2012, frustrated at the lack of funding coming through for *The Witch*, he vented to his writer brother Max, who was writing a screenplay about a ghost running a lighthouse.

Excited by his brother's idea, images flooded Eggers' mind. "I pictured the two-shot of them at the first dinner scene, that's quite close to what it is in the film," he says. "I thought of the crusty, dusty, rusty, musty atmosphere and the facial hair and the cable-knit sweaters and the pipe smoke and the salt cod. It was just clear." Max had been having trouble with his screenplay, so Eggers asked him if he could try writing it himself, and wrote a title-page: 'The Lighthouse. This movie must be photographed on black-and-white 35mm negative.'

Steeping himself in research, Eggers ditched his brother's ghost idea and discovered the true story of two 19th-century lighthouse keepers, both named Tom, stuck in a lighthouse in a storm. Using this as a morsel of inspiration, he realised his film "could be a story about identity that could devolve into something obscure and mad". He wrote a 15-page treatment, then shelved it when *The Witch*'s funding came through, going off to make his extraordinary horror film about religion, sorcery and a nasty little goat named Black Phillip.

The Witch announced Eggers as an outstanding new talent, and he had further scripts ready to go. The allure of the light, though, was strong, and he and his brother went back to *The Lighthouse*, writing a claustrophobic story of masculinity and madness, lightly sprinkled with supernatural rumblings, but grubbily human.

Willem Dafoe and Robert Pattinson were both blown away by *The Witch*, and contacted Eggers, eager to work with him. He sent them both *The Lighthouse*'s screenplay; they both loved it. "'Whoa, how is this gonna work?'" recalls Pattinson of reading it. He couldn't wait to play Efraim Winslow, the assistant who, in Maine, 1890, is driven to wits' end by Dafoe's lighthouse keeper Thomas Wake, a sadistic seadog. "There was plenty of anticipated pleasure in doing this movie," says Dafoe. He's on the phone, but you can hear him grinning.

The Eggers brothers tweaked the script to fit the actors, "to make sure it was perfect for them," says Robert, who then swamped them with research materials — lighthouse miscellanea, sea shanties, period writing, dialect tapes. Both grew tremendous facial hair — Pattinson the moustache to end all moustaches, Dafoe a beard that looks like it's walked into the room by itself.

As on *The Witch*, Eggers went for broke with the authenticity, from the dialogue to the clothing to the 19th-century cutlery. He wanted *The Lighthouse* to feel like 1890, shooting on black-and-white film to enhance the atmosphere (and the cheekbones), while using a custom filter to make it look like ancient cinema, rehoused lenses from 1918, and an antiquated aspect ratio — the almost square 1:19 — to emphasise the cramped interiors. Alas, out on location, much of the gear was battered by storms. Cameras broke down, rain deflectors collapsed, takes were useless because the lenses were fogged. And then there were the humans. *The Lighthouse* shoot was merciless.

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EGGERS AND HIS crew couldn't find a period lighthouse that wasn't on a remote island — ie inaccessible and impossible to shoot — so they built one, 70 feet tall, on Cape Forchu, a peninsula of volcanic rock on the southern ›



Right: Robert Pattinson and director Robert Eggers on location in Nova Scotia. **Main:** Willem Dafoe and Pattinson pose in front of the 70-foot-tall lighthouse built for the film.



tip of Nova Scotia, along with Winslow and Wake's adjoining cottage. Eggers then brought Pattinson and Dafoe in for a week of rehearsals. Pattinson was already in town, having arrived in Halifax early to immerse himself in his character. "It's the most luxurious thing to do, to just go and be by yourself in a hotel room and only be thinking about the project for a while," he says. And he had demons to deal with.

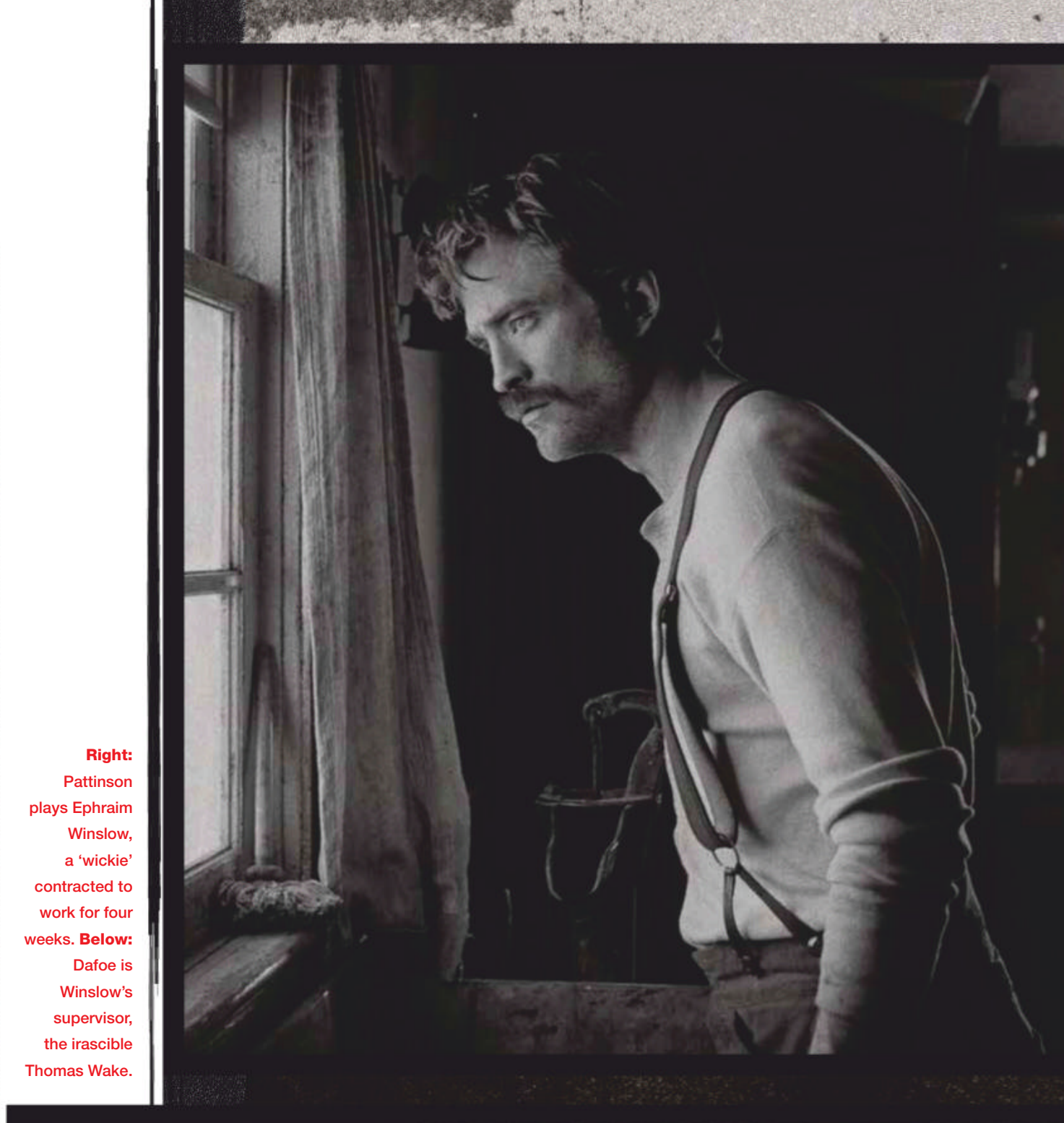
Eggers needed Dafoe and Pattinson to rehearse not for performance purposes, but for camera blocking, "pre-planning the movie to death". There was friction, though — Dafoe, with his theatre background, is used to rehearsals, loves rehearsals, goes for it in rehearsals. Pattinson is not used to rehearsals and wanted to hold back in order to surprise himself — and them — when the cameras rolled. "So," says Eggers, "in the rehearsals, as Dafoe became more and more amped up, Rob became more and more closed down." Pattinson clammed up. He was convinced Eggers was angry with him, convinced Eggers and Dafoe thought he was awful, convinced he was going to get fired. Eggers wasn't angry at all, he says — it was all in Pattinson's head.

"It almost certainly was in my head!" laughs Pattinson. "I think I foster a terror of failure. And I really allow it to build anxiety in my mind coming up to shoots. I guess a lot of actors have that impostor syndrome thing. But that fear of messing up, and the fear of being humiliated — actually I find it a really big drive, a catalyst. So I think I poke at that fear myself. For someone sitting in front of me it looks I'm just sitting there being really normal, but in my head I'm spiralling down with terror." He laughs again, at the absurdity of it all.

Dafoe has his own psychological fancies. Throughout the rehearsals and shoot, while Eggers and Pattinson stayed at a local bed and breakfast, he chose to stay in a fisherman's cottage five minutes' walk from the lighthouse, alone. He "wanted to stay marinated in his character enough that he was in that little cottage eating off of enamel cups and plates," says Eggers.

"It wasn't a Method idea, it was a practical idea," says Dafoe, downplaying it. "I knew we were gonna be working long hours. I like being out in nature. This little fishing cottage was quite remote. I was by myself. My life was simple. When I came home I would do my studies, cook myself dinner and go to bed. So what was life? Life was showing up, putting on those lighthouse clothes and being that guy. People gotta understand, it's a pleasure. That's the job at hand, and I'm happy to concentrate on it."

On set, meanwhile, Pattinson kept to himself, not socialising, lunching alone. "I wanted to catch the alien vibe that I felt from the script when I first read it," he explains. "I found the script very inspiring and I didn't want to do anything to shake that inspiration off. I wanted to stay in that world. It's always a bit scary if you start building too familiar a life on the set. The more normal your relationships are with





Right: Pattinson plays Ephraim Winslow, a 'wickie' contracted to work for four weeks. **Below:** Dafoe is Winslow's supervisor, the irascible Thomas Wake.

everyone on the movie, I find, it's more difficult to actually play a part. I feel like people are able to judge me. Whereas if you're a bit of an enigma on set, I find it easier to perform. And with this, everything was on location, so you could really feel the elements."

Everybody felt those elements. The punishing weather was great for the cinematography and the performances, but tough. "It does wear on you. Human beings move slower when it's pouring and you have gale force winds," laughs Eggers. Those winds were so relentless they could barely hear each other speak. The extreme conditions on the screen were genuine. "It was difficult, but of course that was the pleasure," says Dafoe. "You can't act bone-chilling cold. When you're in that state you're operating from a different place. So you kind of welcome that. It's not pleasant but you know it's not forever. As an actor you're happy to be a little miserable."

Dafoe and Pattinson thrived on the external stimuli, working at full pelt, unleashed. Dafoe's performance is exceptionally unhinged. Did he have to plumb any psychological depths to pull this madman out of himself? "No, that's always there," he says. "No plumbing. It's just beneath the surface." He cackles heartily.

Pattinson was in deep. "When it was raining in the cottage, Rob was bathing and drinking the rain water in-between takes," says Eggers. He's not joking. "He spun around a lot, that was helpful to him. And he was gagging himself all the time." The gagging wasn't required — Pattinson would do it to make himself feel more emotional. On the first day of filming, right before the first take of the first shot, he threw up, says Eggers. Again, this wasn't required, or expected. "It was just something that he does to prepare," laughs Eggers. "I don't know why. I hope he brings it to Batman."

It's all to do with this character, explains Pattinson. "It's someone who's so uncomfortable in his own skin that he kind of wants to turn himself inside out." So Pattinson literally did do that. "Yeah! The first shot we did was me masturbating. It was after the rehearsal period, where I was pretty certain I was gonna get fired, so I thought, 'I know what's *not* gonna get me fired — I'm gonna jack off and throw up all over myself!'" he grins. "It was kind of an accident."

It was an unforgiving time, and they all had their moments. Recollecting the shoot last year for a piece in *Interview* magazine, Pattinson told Dafoe that after the fifth take of being blasted in the face with a fire-hose, he... well. "I didn't know that he wanted to punch me in the face," says Eggers, having read the piece himself. The hose was needed to enhance the rain for the camera, he says. "It was a hard shot, so it took a lot of takes."

"I didn't actually wanna punch him in the face," maintains Pattinson now. "The fire-hose thing was actually really great. I had two black eyes afterwards, and I'm like, 'Jesus!' It puts you in a completely different headspace. You're going in for a fight, except you're fighting against a hosepipe." He loved everything that was thrown at him, including the fake human excrement. "It's fun, it's like an obstacle course. It's all inspiration, you're overwhelmed with things to react to all the time, it takes away your self-consciousness. Every director on every movie, at take one, should just throw a pile of shit in your face." He cracks up. "That is directing!"

Eggers crumbled off-set. "Look, did I ever cry in my hotel room with a bottle of bourbon? Of course," he says. "You don't do that on set. On set you're the fucking *general*, Goddamn it! It wasn't a jovial set, with joking in-between takes. Everyone was trying to stay focused and stay warm."

There is, though, comedy on screen. *The Lighthouse* is perversely comical, from the sheer insanity of it all, to the outright slapstick. *The Witch* was rigidly humourless, and this was a reaction to that. "If I was going to explore misery again, I wanted to be able to laugh at the misery," says Eggers. Dafoe's character farts within two minutes. "Yeah, the intention is you get your ticket and you think, 'Oh no, I've just walked into a Hungarian arthouse movie and I'm stuck,'" says Eggers. "And then Willem Dafoe farts."

The scatological humour has a purpose, says Eggers. "It's just part of life. And plus, this is an exploration of masculinity. Anything that the biological male body can excrete is in the movie. You look at a lighthouse and you realise it's a giant phallus, and you've got two guys in a giant phallus, so what's gonna go on in there? Nothing good!" He laughs. "Nothing good."

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THE LIGHTHOUSE PREMIERED in May this year at the Cannes Film Festival where, on stage afterwards, Eggers, Dafoe and Pattinson all grinned as they soaked up a rapturous ovation. "I was quite terrified," remembers Eggers. "We were standing backstage and Rob was relating every time he'd been booed at Cannes and how terrible it feels. So that reception was an extra relief."

Someone in the audience asked if any animals were mistreated on set. "These two animals!" said Dafoe, gesturing to himself and Pattinson. But all three speak with joy about their experience. Dafoe has seen it three times now, loving it more each time, lost in what Eggers has done. "I think this is a beautiful film," he says. "And when I watch it I don't think about myself. I see someone else up there."

The film is truly nuts. "Well, gee, thanks!" responds Eggers. "As with *The Witch*, this is me trying to commune with the folk culture of where I grew up. And luckily I had two fucking amazing, passionate, crazy actors to help explore this with me, man!" He laughs again, delighted — and relieved — at how beautifully it all worked out.

***THE LIGHTHOUSE* IS IN CINEMAS FROM 6 FEBRUARY**

HIRSUTE HEROES

WILLEM DAFOE'S *LIGHTHOUSE* BEARD IS WILD, BUT HE HAS NOTHING ON THIS LOT



HERMIT • LIFE OF BRIAN

This is what you get when, living alone, you're left to your own devices and let it all go. We've all been there. The juniper bush hermit's beard is long enough to cover his modesty. Not that he cares.



TERL • BATTLEFIELD EARTH

Good heavens above, would you look at that. The not-quite dreadlocks cascade from every section of the Psychlo's face. Some of it is head hair. Some of it is beard hair. All of it is silly.



ASH • ARMY OF DARKNESS

He slept too long! Having swallowed one too many drops of his time-travel potion, dunderheaded deadite-killer Ash wakes up a few centuries too late, in dire need of a shave, a manicure and a bath.



DAVY JONES • PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN

When is a beard not a beard? When it's an octopus. Although this isn't an octopus. It's a beard. Made of octopus tentacles. Wriggling of its own accord, Davy Jones' slimy splendour is a beaut.

A BOY AND HIS FÜHRER



WORDS DAN JOLIN

HOW DO YOU FOLLOW UP *THOR: RAGNAROK*? FOR DIRECTOR TAIKA WAITITI, THE ANSWER WAS TO MAKE A COMEDY ABOUT NAZI GERMANY, AND CAST HIMSELF AS HITLER. UNSURPRISINGLY, *JOJO RABBIT* TURNED OUT TO BE HIS MOST DIFFICULT MOVIE YET



IT WASN'T THE MOUSTACHE THAT BOTHERED HIM MOST



Nor the straightened, dyed hair, pasted down over his forehead. Nor the jackboots or the brown shirt. Nor even the sweat-inducing fat suit clinging beneath it all. When Taika Waititi first looked at himself in the mirror as Adolf Hitler, the thing that *really* made him uncomfortable was the swastika band wrapped around his left arm. "It's so bright and in your face," he grimaces. "It's just a horrible thing to look at."

Today, late September in Hollywood, Waititi's hair is back to its springy, grey-flecked self, and he's stretched out on a couch wriggling his toes in a pair of odd houndstooth socks. Unlike, say, Charlie Chaplin, who lampooned *der Führer* in 1940's *The Great Dictator*, Waititi couldn't look any less like Hitler if he tried. But when he first saw himself as the Nazi commander-in-chief, who appears as a ten-year-old German boy's imaginary friend in Waititi's latest film *Jojo Rabbit*, he wasn't so much shocked by the transformation as mortified.

"I was just sort of embarrassed. That's the main thing. I was embarrassed all the time to look like that. Going on set, I'd say, 'Look, sorry everyone.' It felt like it was hard for it not to be gratuitous. You start asking yourself why you're really doing it: 'Why *am* I dressed like this?'"

It's a good question. After directing the raucous ard ridiculously successful *Thor: Ragnarok* for Marvel Studios, Taika Waititi arguably could have made any movie he wanted. "The next logical choice was *Batman*, wasn't it?" he says. Instead, he chose to make a whimsical satire set in Nazi Germany, starring himself as the founder of the Third Reich.

It's fair to ask: what the hell was he thinking?

TAIKA AND ADOLF go back a long way. Despite being half-Russian-Jewish (on his mother Robin's side), at around the age of 12 he became fascinated by Hitler — primarily that moustache which, confusingly for young Taika, the Führer shared with the none-more-loveable Chaplin. He also started obsessively drawing swastikas. He'd scribble them on his school notebooks, then instantly feel guilty and quickly turn them into windows before anybody noticed. Soon all his schoolbooks were covered in pictures of houses. There is a moment in Waititi's semi-autobiographical 2010 film *Boy* where, in the role of the title character's no-good dad, he reveals a swastika etched into his childhood bedroom wall, hidden behind a hanging picture. "Don't get into the Nazi stuff," he warns his kid, as if talking directly to his past self.

Of course, grown-up Taika didn't heed that advice, creatively speaking. Around the time he was making *Boy*, his mother told him about a novel she'd just read, *Caging Skies* by Christine Leunens, which involved a Hitler-worshipping German kid who discovers and ultimately befriends a Jewish girl hiding in his attic during World War II. It is tempting to think that, having drawn on the Maori side of his childhood for *Boy*, he realised *Caging Skies* would offer him a chance to explore his Jewish heritage. But, says Waititi, "It's not about me trying to make a Jewish film, or a white film."

It was more about Waititi trying to fathom the terrible acts people commit during wartime, despite lessons we should have learned from the past. He'd been reading about the Bosnian War, keen to investigate exactly what had happened during this conflict, which had raged on the other side of the world while he was a teenager in New Zealand, more interested in going out and "kissing girls". He was shocked and disgusted by what he learned. "I could not believe how atrocious some of the violence was against civilians," he says, "and against children and against women." It made him wonder how, after the horrors of World War II, anything like that could still happen. Curious, he looked up how many conflicts had occured since 1945. He soon gave up. There have been hundreds.

"The cynical part of me, which I really fight with a lot, tries to tell me that we will never learn our lesson," he says. "But the optimist in me keeps reminding me that we have to keep creating art, and we have to keep teaching each other lessons and telling these stories. And we have to try our hardest to raise children to understand that peace, tolerance and understanding are better."

As Waititi points out, "If you look at all of my films, even *Thor*, they're about children and how they perceive the world." What, he imagined, would the horrors of war look like through the











Above: Director and star Taika Waititi sports the distinctive look of Adolf Hitler. **Right, top to bottom:** Roman Griffin Davis' lonely, impressionable Jojo; Scarlett Johansson is Jojo's warm, empathic mother, Rosie; Thomasin McKenzie's Elsa; Griffin Davis and Johansson on set.

eyes of a child? "When I was growing up there was constant chaos, and these crazy tumultuous events in my family, on both sides. At a certain point, I must have been ten or 11, I remember thinking: 'Oh, you can't trust these people.' Seeing the behaviour of grown-ups made me realise that no-one ever really grows up. The world is just full of lunatics, and I think in times of conflict they become even more crazy and absurd in their behaviour." *Caging Skies*' conceit struck him as the ideal way to tell a story which would tackle this madness, but in such a way that he could deliver a positive message. Though, being Taika Waititi, he first had to add in some jokes and a daft, imaginary-Hitler character.

"Comedy has been used since 1939 on that guy," he says of that decision. "In fact, before that, he was ridiculed in the press. And before that, other dictators got it through comedy and caricatures and satire as well. So it's not a new tradition. In fact, I personally feel comedy delivers the message more efficiently and memorably, because it really highlights the absurdity of these beliefs. You can laugh at them. Which is why Old Mate in the Oval Office spends most of his time on Twitter retaliating against celebrities: because he can't stand the idea of being made fun of."

Not that Waititi had Trump in mind when he wrote *Jojo Rabbit*. The script was originally finished in 2011, and he had hoped it would be his next film after *Boy*. The trouble was, nobody wanted to make it.

THE PROBLEM WASN'T the script. That, in fact, went down really well, securing the film initial financing from Germany's Studio Babelsberg and, in 2012, making it onto the much-coveted Black List, Hollywood's round-up of the coolest screenplays on the market. And while Waititi has joked that he's really bad at pitching, his touchstones — *Life Is Beautiful*, *Dr. Strangelove*, and the James Stewart-and-imaginary-rabbit movie *Harvey* — were enticing to the "small studios" he approached. The problem was, his would-be producers were keen to cast a big name as Hitler.

"Back then it was like, 'Okay, this movie's gonna cost this much money, so you've gotta get an actor who is gonna bring the audience,'" says Waititi. Some ideas were entertained (though he can't name names), and the script was sent out to various agents, but nobody responded. In retrospect, Waititi sees this as a blessing.

"I feel like if it was — I'm just gonna pull a name out of the hat — George Clooney playing Hitler, that's all anyone would talk about. It would distract from the message of the film and from the real story, which is about those kids. He would be the main person on the poster, and it would be 'The Clooney Hitler Film', rather than 'That Satire About Nazis'."

So he decided to back off from *Jojo Rabbit*, and instead made his brilliant vampire mockumentary *What We Do In The Shadows*,











Above: Waititi's Hitler is more man-child than monster. **Right, top to bottom:** Archie Yates' Yorki, Jojo's best friend; Rosie and Jojo encounter Nazi Captain Klenzendorf (Sam Rockwell) and Jungvolk instructor Fräulein Rahm (Rebel Wilson); Alfie Allen (at the back) is Finkel, Klenzendorf's second-in-command; Waititi with his directing cap on.

which was followed by *Hunt For The Wilderpeople* and, of course, *Thor: Ragnarok*. Unsurprisingly, this last movie ignited fresh enthusiasm for his dust-gathering Black List entry, and Fox Searchlight came knocking. "They said, 'We want to make this. In fact, we're really only interested in making it if *you* play Hitler.'"

Even though Waititi admits "I can crowbar myself into my movies pretty well", he insists it had never even crossed his mind that he should goose-step in as Adolf. "No, look at me!" he laughs. "I did not see myself as the logical choice. I was like, 'You guys are *nuts*. Why would I do that? And also *how* would I do that? You want me to bleach my skin?" But, as was pointed out to Waititi, you can do a lot with make-up these days, and more to the point, it made sense for the person playing the role to be someone who instinctively understood what the character was.

"I didn't need to explain to anyone the level of buffoonery he had to have. I think a lot of other actors would've done a shitload of research and tried to get it perfect with all the nuances. But that was not anything I was remotely interested in doing. Because I don't want to play Hitler. I wanna play a ten-year-old's idea of a mixture of his absent dad and this dictator who he idolises."

Jojo Rabbit's Hitler is a larger-than-reality man-child who initially acts as a confidant and mentor, but gradually turns dangerously domineering and violently resentful as he senses his young friend growing away from him (and, indeed, growing *up*). He is, in fact, much like the father in *Boy*, who Waititi admits is almost the same character. Which makes him perfect casting.

He is also to some degree a reassuring presence for fans of Waititi's previous films, whom you could forgive for being a little unsure of seeing the director's playful brand of humour applied to the atrocities of the Third Reich and its Final Solution. Like Boy or *Wilderpeople*'s Ricky Baker, Jojo Betzler (Roman Griffin Davis) is a loveable outsider. But he is utterly taken in by Nazi propaganda, so terrified by the malicious content that when the teenage girl in his attic (Thomasin McKenzie) first appears, Waititi shoots it like a tongue-in-cheek horror movie.

This isn't the Kiwi filmmaker's first balancing act between humour and drama. All his films are comedies, but they all also drop dark-edged dramatic payloads amid the laughs, whether that's flashing back to Boy's mother's death, showing the likeable vampires of *What We Do In The Shadows* exsanguinating innocent people, or obliterating Thor's entire homeland. But, he says, it was far trickier walking that line with *Jojo Rabbit*.

"There's more to say with this film," he says, "and I was really careful not to completely undermine its message with a joke just because I thought the joke was really good. There were a couple of jokes I pulled out at the last minute because I felt they were threatening to distract from the deeper message."

There was also the danger of going too far with the Nazi-themed elements. Waititi's directing style is typically to allow his actors the freedom to ad-lib, try jokes out in the moment. But what worked on *Shadows* or *Ragnarok* didn't always come out so well on *Jojo*. There were a few points during the Czech Republic-based shoot, especially with Rebel Wilson (who plays bloodthirsty Jungvolk instructor Fräulein Rahm) and Stephen Merchant (as Gestapo stooge Captain Deertz), when they experimented with pushing the characters' detestability.

"I said, 'Let's riff on some ideas here. We want to hate these characters. Let's give 'em a couple of racist things to say.'" But once they started bouncing ideas around, it didn't take long before they wanted to drop them entirely. "Normally in









Illustration: Russell Dauterman

those situations it's a massive laughfest and you want to keep going forever. On this it was more like, 'What other horrible, disgusting things can we say?' 'I don't really wanna say any of them anymore.' 'Yeah, I don't want to come up with them anymore either, so let's just stop.'"

New Zealanders are, he insists, "a very polite group", especially when it comes to humour. "We don't tend to enjoy making the uncomfortable kind of comedy where you're really pushing it. So to me it would have felt uncomfortable to just shoot something where you're going as Nazi as you can on everything."

THERE WAS ONE more reason why Waititi was keen to make *Jojo Rabbit* his follow-up to *Thor: Ragnarok*. For most of his life, he's felt most comfortable channelling his creativity in several different directions at once. As well as filmmaking, he enjoys painting, photography, fashion and collecting things (stamps, cameras, sewing machines). Even within filmmaking he prefers to work on several things at the same time. "That's how I feel I operate really well. I've always been like that, distracted by other things, sparkly things over here."

However, *Ragnarok* forced him to mono-task. "It was great, but it was two years of the same movie and I had to make sure I really focused on it." So as soon as that was done, he craved something he could pull off relatively quickly and which also allowed him to fully indulge his own independent, creative whims. Something like *Jojo*. "Although I felt ownership over *Thor*, it was not my original content, and I really like doing *my* films," he says.

While this hasn't stopped him from signing on for another *Thor* movie, the script for which he is in the middle of writing, he is getting in another 'small, personal one' first: *Next Goal Wins*, based on the 2014 documentary of the same name about the American Samoa national football team's attempt to qualify for the World Cup, which he'll be shooting in Hawaii by the time you read this. Not that he's into football or anything. "I've never, ever wanted to do a sports film," he says. "Just like I never, ever wanted to do a film about Nazis. Or a kid and an old man on the run in the woods. Or vampire flatmates. But I'm really happy I did them because they were good challenges and exercised a different part of my brain each time."

Being Hitler (or at least a kind of Hitler) was one of his biggest challenges yet. But lying here on the couch, Waititi seems pleased with how it turned out, even if he's not as sure of himself as his dangerously zealous on-screen persona. "I'm trying to learn how to own achievement more," he says. "New Zealanders are terrible at it. But I am starting to recognise that I might be actually pretty good at this. *Jojo Rabbit* is my sixth film, and I feel quite good about that, too. It's actually not a bad track record." Not bad at all. And fantastically unpredictable.

***JOJO RABBIT* IS IN CINEMAS FROM 26 DECEMBER**

TAIKA FIVE

THE RAGNAROKER BRINGS US UP TO SPEED ON HIS WORKS IN (OR OUT OF) PROGRESS



1 BUBBLES

This stop-motion Netflix movie about Michael Jackson's chimpanzee was going to follow *Thor: Ragnarok*. But, Waititi confirms, "I'm not doing *Bubbles* anymore." Partly because he felt his fantastical-leaning style would jar with Isaac Adamson's script, which "sits very much in reality". But mainly, "The documentary [*Leaving Neverland*] came out and it was, 'Right, there's no *way* anyone would make *Bubbles* now!'"

2 AKIRA

"It's on hold because our script wasn't ready in time," sighs Waititi. Warner Bros. had given him a hard start date of August 2019 for shooting, if he was going to make his adaptation of Katsuhiro Otomo's seminal sci-fi anime before rolling on *Thor: Love And Thunder* for Disney. "But it started to overlap. So it wasn't possible."

3 NEXT GOAL WINS

This adaptation of the 2014 documentary has been in development at Andy Serkis' company The Imaginarium since 2015, and is now in production as Waititi's next joint. "It's *Cool Runnings* with soccer," he says. Not that he's into football. "To make an uplifting sports film about a sport I don't particularly care about is pretty cool," he laughs. It's due out next year.

4 THOR: LOVE AND THUNDER

"This film is gonna be pretty bombastic," grins Waititi. "It's gonna make *Ragnarok* (2017) look like a drama!" The headline here is Natalie Portman's return as Jane Foster. Or rather, as the female incarnation of the storm-wielding hero. "I missed her in *Ragnarok*. I'm hoping this is going to be more interesting for her than just being a scientist on Earth, 'cause she gets to be a superhero and have powers and hold the hammer."

5 WE'RE WOLVES

The sequel to *What We Do In The Shadows* is as likely to appear during the next few years as a vampire's reflection. "It's on our list, but we're not anywhere near writing anything." The idea is to chew into the lycanthropic side of Wellington's underbelly. "I see it as following Stu [Rutherford] and Rhys [Darby] around. To be able to bring those characters back would be cool."

THE ART OF STAR

TWO OF THE STAR WARS POSTERS IN THIS ISSUE WERE SUPPLIED BY AMERICAN COMPANY ACME ARCHIVES. WE SPOKE TO CEO **LISA McLAIN** ABOUT HER LOVE FOR LUKE, LEIA AND CO, AND FOUND OUT WHAT INSPIRED THE ARTISTS WHO CREATED THESE MASTERPIECES.

WORDS **DAN LENNARD**



REY'N OF TERROR

JEREMY SALIBA WASN'T given much time to put together his compelling piece *Shadowy Corruption*. "The word came down from Acme Archives that Lucasfilm would like to see a piece themed around Dark Rey, and that it would need to be a quick one," said the Californian artist." I was thrilled to get the chance to work on it; I love dark characters and being able to do an official version of this new dark version of Rey was an awesome opportunity.

"I immediately got to work coming up with some concepts, which was a challenge because I know about as much about that aspect of the movie as anyone else, and sent off a batch of thumbnail sketches of my ideas for review. I got official word from Acme a week later on which of the sketches was approved. I knew they wanted a quick turnaround – the hope was to be able to release it in time for Triple Force Friday on October 4 – so I got right to work. I probably spent around 10-12 hours on it before sending off a version that's close to what you see now. There was some additional notes on things for me to touch up, but that was basically it."

Star Wars has always been a part of Jeremy's life. "I remember going to see *Return Of The Jedi* on opening night when I was six," he recalled. "My aunt took me and she had to read the subtitles for Jabba The Hutt to me. It was one of the most polarising experiences of my life — Darth Vader, the character who was essentially the boogeyman for my entire life at that point — decided to be a good guy and save his son. My mind was blown and I'm pretty sure I've been chasing that incredible experience ever since."

As a fan, Jeremy had lots of posters of Ralph McQuarrie art on his bedroom walls. But the biggest artistic inspiration came from an unlikely source. "It was when I bought my first comic book – *Amazing Spider-Man* #313, drawn by Todd McFarlane – that I REALLY got hooked on drawing."

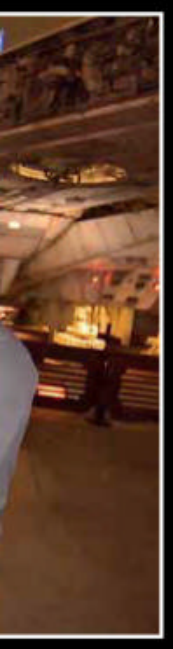
*** Jeremy's art can be found on Dark Ink Art (www.darkinkart.com).**

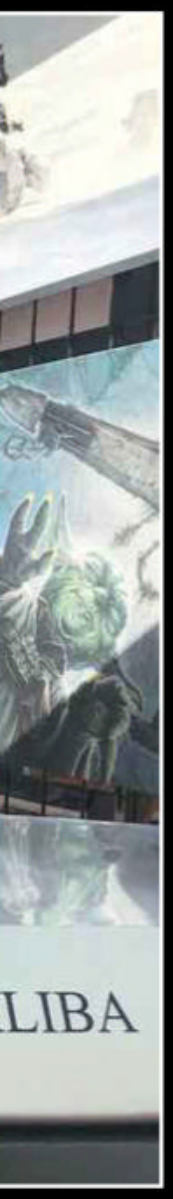




Top right: Jeremy Saliba gets into full Skywalker mode. **Right:** Jeremy displays some of his amazing artwork.

WARS





NEED A HOT Boba Fett painting or three to adorn your living room wall? Can't imagine waking up every morning in your bedroom without staring at a picture of dawn at Hoth? Well, then you'd a appreciate Acme Direct and Dark Ink Art, two sites that are a one-stop online shop featuring tons of limited-edition prints related to the *Star Wars* franchise.

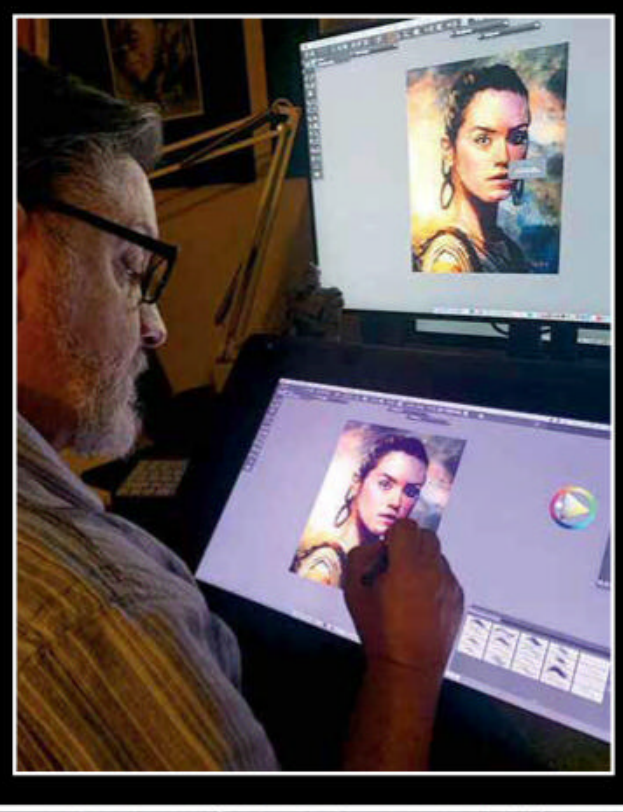
The company that owns and manages the sites — Acme Archives LTD — was formed in 1996. Not surprisingly, CEO Lisa McLain is a huge fan of the Lucasfilm series. "My husband and I were proudly at *The Phantom Menace* on opening day," she said, "and every film since on opening day. We also had seen the original trilogy many, many, many times."

Acme set about attracting artists from all corners of the art world. "Having a background in entertainment, it was relatively easy to get 'industry' artists involved," Lisa explained. "We also took several fan artists and brought them into the forefront of what we do for *Star Wars*. When we assembled all the art and artists for the *Star Wars Visions* art book (published in 2010), we spent two years recruiting artists — some of whom were very well-known. We're very proud of that book and the art in it."

These days, there's a staggering range of art for sale on the websites, but when we put Lisa on the spot she revealed her personal favourite piece was *Regrets* by Masey. "It really is as close to emotion as you can see from the Vader mask and moves me when I think of Anakin and Padme."

And if she could play any character in a *Star Wars* film, who it would be? "I always wanted to be Leia. She takes no &%^S& and clears her own path."





Top right: Cliff Cramp works on a piece the old-school way. **Right:** Cliff shows that he's a wizard on the computer as well.



NOT SO COMPLICATED

CLIFF CRAMP HAS given us *The Mandalorian*-inspired *It's A Complicated Profession*. "I work fairly fast," he explained. "Much of my work is created in one sitting. I rarely keep track of hours because the worth that is placed on the work shouldn't be based on time. I'm a lot faster now that I'm older and have been doing this for a bit. I try to set the composition within 30-45 minutes, then I know if it's worth taking to finish. The trailer was my main inspiration for the work. I've been looking forward to this show since it was announced. Much of my work is heavy in environment. I wanted this illustration to focus on the character."

Cliff saw the original *Star Wars* in a cinema in 1977. "I come from a lower middle-class family and our usual movie experience was at the drive-in," he recalled. "The walk-in theatre wasn't common for us. My dad worked a lot and rarely came home early. On a Friday afternoon he walked into the house way earlier than normal [and said] a new movie was out and he wanted to take us to see it. I remember sitting in the theatre thinking this was so epic on all accounts. The world building fed my imagination at an early age."

Cliff named *Rogue One* as his favourite. "It was a fantastic prequel to the OT. The theme of sacrifice was powerful. I liked the story arc and the tie-in to *A New Hope* was fantastic. I thought Jyn Erso was a super-convincing hero and the support cast did a wonderful job. I cared about them a lot even though their demise was foreshadowed. This is why their sacrifice was so impactful. It was unlike any other *Star Wars* film and yet it fit perfectly into the *Star Wars* universe."

Why does the franchise inspire such a loyal fan following? "It has a strong good vs evil element," he said. "The main theme, or message, is one of hope. It's character driven...we follow these characters because we love them. The original *Star Wars* has a great formula, but it's the characters that bring us back."

*** Cliff's art is available from Acme Direct (www.acmearchivesdirect.com).**


THE

h o o d

Greta Gerwig's second film as writer-director is her feverishly awaited spin on literary classic **LITTLE WOMEN**. To celebrate its arrival, we asked Gerwig to interview the four stars who play the March sisters. The resulting conversation is exactly as brilliant as you'd expect.

GRETA GERWIG





THERE WERE MANY THRILLING ASPECTS of making *Little Women* — the chance to bring to life a story and characters that were so close to me that they almost felt as if they belonged to my own autobiography, the challenge of stretching myself on a larger cinematic canvas, to build the world of the 1800s, to create a big environment for this big story to unfold in, to intellectually play with the intersection of women, art and money, which is always what I've thought the book was truly about, to finally write an ending that Louisa May Alcott might have enjoyed. But all of these paled in comparison to the ultimate thrill of working with the genius cast that agreed to come lend their talents to this project.

I love each one of these women and the characters that they created. They were always keen to find the subtext, the undercurrent, what wasn't explicitly on the page but was buried in the soul of each character. The film would not be what it is without them, and I owe everything to these four women who became both glorious individuals and a formidable four-headed beast of sisterhood. Although these questions might appear silly at first glance, I assure you they are not. I wanted to ask them questions that would give me one last chance to engage with how creative they are, how bright, how funny, how sincere. I can't wait to read their answers.

How would you describe *Little Women* to someone who has just arrived from another planet? Assume you don't have to explain what sisters are or what family is, but that they don't know anything else.

Emma Watson (Meg March): Hello, galactic traveller! Welcome to Earth's Visitors' Centre. See all this mystery, confusion, pain and possibility in front of you on this new planet? Isn't it equally overwhelming and exciting? Well, that's what we humans call adolescence, and, here, take this map, it's called *Little Women*, and it'll guide you through a few possible routes to take on your road trip to self-actualisation on this planet. Enjoy the views on the bumpy roads ahead!

Florence Pugh (Amy March): There are four siblings and every single one of them is incredibly different. Different goals, different interests, different journeys. Despite this, they all love and respect that they have this vibrant loud life at home. They fight, they hit, they kiss and they cuddle. Repeat.

Eliza Scanlen (Beth March): Following a sisterhood of four *Homo sapiens* amidst a terrible war between terrestrials, *Little Women* proves with a pen ('PEN'/pen: an instrument containing pigment) and some bark from a tree that you can change the world.

Saoirse Ronan (Jo March): Greta, I think you put it perfectly when you wrote in the script — the very first page — that this was a story about a hidden world belonging to our four girls and their mother. A whole entire world that existed while the war happened outside.

Which of the March sisters would be most likely to commit a crime and why? Not a violent crime, necessarily, perhaps embezzling or mail fraud or something like that? Which sister, what did she do? Defend your reasoning.

Watson: Jo March would most definitely be an





Above: Writer/director Greta Gerwig (second left) on set with Emma Watson, Saoirse Ronan and Florence Pugh. **Left:** Meg (Watson), Jo (Ronan) and Amy (Pugh) perform Jo's play 'The Witch's Curse, An Operatic Tragedy'.

activist who puts her body and mind on the line, organising and participating in direct action. Her core is made of "a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws", which Martin Luther King Jr defined as civil disobedience. There's an anarchist sparkle to Jo — I see her getting arrested for writing on how the personal is political, like Emma Goldman disseminating illegal, but crucial, information on birth control in 1916. Emma Goldman, like Louisa May Alcott, was inspired by Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson, and thought of them as among America's first philosophical anarchists. So, anarchism is definitely in the soil Jo sprouted from!

Pugh: Most definitely Amy. Amy would commit a crime knowingly, however Beth might commit a crime accidentally. For example, Beth might leave the post office with a stamp in her hand and only notice when she got home. Amy would dabble in forgery: she would probably even claim that her artistic skills were finally getting used!

Scanlen: Amy is so eager to impress that eventually she'd get wrapped up in some petty crime! If the March sisters lived in the 21st century, I can imagine Amy getting caught with a fake ID entering one of those swanky bars that call bartending "mixology". Arriving at the door she performs her script. She's dangerously convincing, but when met with the security guard's steely stare, she falters. After some interrogation and a teary plea that, "*It's me, I swear!*", the ID is snatched from her hands. Meg picks her up without Marmee [the Marches' mother, played in the film by Laura Dern] ever (that they know of) finding out.

Ronan: Amy. Theft. She stole a rich lady's jewels. Or *someone's book perhaps*?! Amy has the ability (more so when she's young) to be sweet and innocent one minute and quite cunning the next. I think she would make a fine criminal.

Each one of you is brilliant and perfect in the film, but please write about a moment on the set where you thought, "Damn it! I don't know if I got it right!" and now it haunts your dreams. (P.S. that happens to me as a director and a writer literally every day, so just know that.)

Watson: I mean, I think you gave the answer away in your question, Greta... literally every day! The March sisters are such loved, complex characters. These characters have kept real, struggling women seen and hopeful enough to persevere though oppressive life circumstances. *Little Women* has been a survival guide for many, like Shamyla's story on episode 680 of the podcast *This American Life*. You all should listen to it, but, essentially, *Little Women* was the only book Shamyla had access to for many difficult years. She had to smuggle it into her house ›



and hide it, ripped into chapters, within her mattress, because she wasn't allowed books. And this was in the 1990s. So, oh yeah, I felt the pressure to "get it right".

Pugh: The scene where Laurie [Timothée Chalamet] finds Amy outside the massive country home after hearing Beth has died. That day was so intense and full that when we came to that last scene my brain was mush, and then suddenly during a take, one gigantic black cloud came over and essentially started a wind storm, whipping leaves left, right and centre. I was so defeated I thought, "Well, that's the Earth's way of laughing."

Scanlen: We spoke so much about our version of Beth being zany and curious, and I was so excited to try it that at a certain point in the shoot I worried, "Am I getting too into this?" I think it was during the scene where Jo and Laurie go ice-skating while Beth is quietly feeding her dolls a miniature version of her own breakfast. I remember being so enthralled by all of the cute miniature things that I almost forgot my lines. Before I knew it we were moving onto the next shot and I silently panicked.

Ronan: When myself, Flo and Emma did the scene near the end when we're in Aunt March's [Meryl Streep] house. The logistics of the scene were tricky as we had to split it up between three different spaces. Walking and talking at the same time proved very difficult for me that day and I definitely walked away feeling rubbish about what I did. I also was convinced that I had ruined two wonderfully written scenes with our dearest Tracy Letts [who plays Mr Dashwood] that take place at the beginning and the end of the movie (shot on the same day). The last scene in particular turned out to be one of my favourite scenes (as a viewer) in the movie.

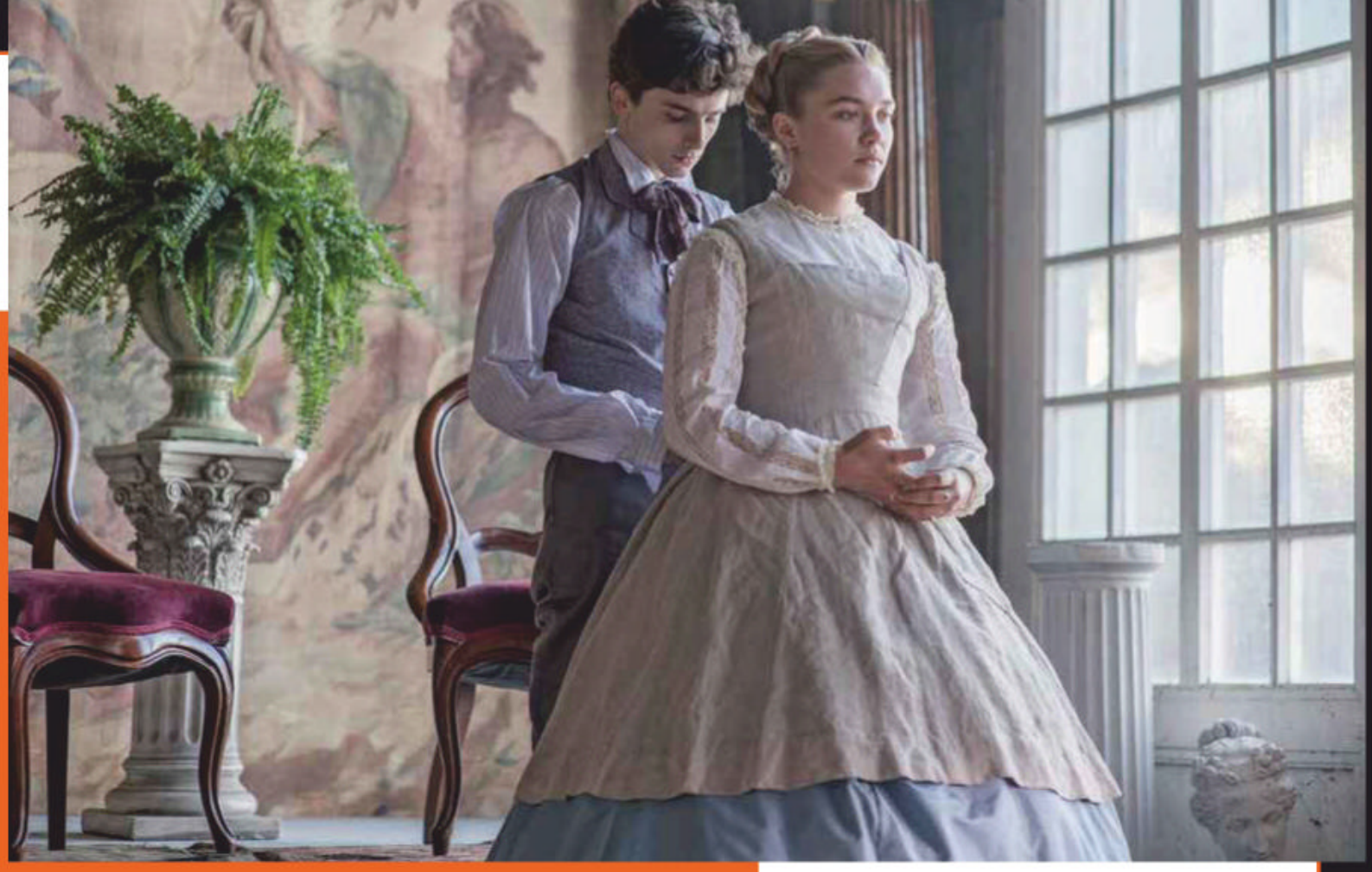
Conversely, tell me about a moment when you thought "*Nailed it!*" Or, if you're too modest to declare victory, recount something that was ridiculously fun to shoot or rehearse.

Watson: Filming in Concord, where Louisa May Alcott lived and wrote, and the level of historical material and research we delved into... I was living my best nerd life! That felt like nailing it and was ridiculously fun. Forced to pick something — my scenes with incredible James Norton [as John Brooke]. I enjoyed working with him so much.

Pugh: I don't think there was a specific moment where I felt, "*Ace!*" However, any scene where Amy got to be annoying and cheeky and deliciously witty I would *love*! Prancing around in far too many frilly petticoats and annoying Saoirse in a scene were definitely the best days.

Scanlen: I prepared all of my piano pieces like a maniac, so it was very rewarding to shoot Beth playing on Mr Laurence's piano for the first time. I thought I had nailed the effortless poise of a young prodigy, until I saw the film... I now know that I make a very interesting pout-face while







Clockwise from left: Meg, the oldest sister, in a borrowed fancy frock — she still recalls the time when the March family were rich; Timothée Chalamet as wealthy neighbour Laurie, with Amy; Vibrant Jo is an accomplished writer.

concentrating. The 'Pickwick Club' scene where we dressed up as very English gentlemen was a lot of fun. I remember you telling me, "When Timmy [Chalamet] tumbles out of the closet, scream from the top of your lungs!", and I don't think anyone was quite prepared for it. I must've ruptured a few eardrums.

Ronan: Anything that involved us four girls was the most fun I had. When we shot the 'preparing for the New Year's party' scene where Jo burns Meg's hair off, it was at the end of the day and I just remember us all giggling so hard. *At nothing* and also *at everything*! I was very happy with how the Friedrich [Louis Garrel] scene turned out (when he tells me he doesn't like what I've written). The feeling that boils up in Jo is one that I'm familiar with and had never been given the chance to pursue in a scene — that combination of embarrassment/fear/arrogance/defiance/shame that swirls around in you when you don't get the reaction you were hoping for from the person you really respect, but you hold on to your righteousness (and pigheadedness) anyway in order to save face. That was so exciting to discover, and to accept for the good of the scene. I loved every minute of working through it with Louis and Greta.

What would your character be doing if she were alive today? I don't mean, like, they'd be 200 years old, but if they'd been born in the 1990s, like all you young people. Eliza, you too! If Beth had been around nowadays she would have been cured of scarlet fever, so you'd be mixing it up with your sisters playing piano and stuff. So what do you all think? Who would the March sisters be now?

Watson: I think, had Meg, the eldest, been born in 1990 (like me), she would have been very susceptible to comparing herself to the 'Paris Hilton'-like girls and materialistic priorities of the early '00s. I see her high-school experience as very Cady Heron in *Mean Girls*, ha ha, so she'd try vanity and suppressing her internal moral compass on for size, but, in the end, it wouldn't fit her at all. Then, I think she'd go to university and probably fall in love with a boy in one of her first-year sociology or psychology classes, because she's studying to become a social worker or a counsellor. She'd end up marrying her college sweetheart, being self-assured enough to have kids in her early twenties, and being a kick-ass working mom. To me, Meg is really a mini-Marmee. She has great emotional strength and enjoys enabling those around her to make the best decisions for themselves.

Pugh: I reckon Amy would totally be terrifying and amazing everyone in the same way she does in the book. She would still study art, ceramics even. I definitely think she would be in charge and would feel empowered by making her ›



own money. She'd play spin the bottle and know all the rules and how to bend them. She'd hate Monopoly because Jo would win. She'd love and tease Beth for her bad choice in shoes and would always call Meg wherever she was in the world to over-explain 'her' side of any story, knowing that Meg would eventually agree.

Scanlen: After completing high school and passing her final piano exams (A+ obviously), Beth would be totally mixing it up! I see Beth on keyboard for some cool indie pop band like Parcels. She'd live by the vegan philosophy and spend her free time running a dairy and egg-free cupcake stall at the weekend farmer's market.

Ronan: I kind of feel like Jo would have still moved to NY, as she does in the film; works for some really crappy magazines to begin with (that she *hates*), but then starts to make a name for herself as she begins to write for some cooler publications about her experience — she's more open and honest in her writing perhaps than she could've been back in the 19th century; she then makes enough money to return to the countryside where she is truly happy and inspired. She goes for a long run every morning, very early. She probably has sex with whoever she wants (can we say that? Of course we can, why not?) and she organises really cool, intimate writers' retreats on her farm! I just read *The Outrun* by Amy Liptrot, which may be influencing my answer.

What was the biggest difference between you and the sister you played?

Watson: Meg definitely blooms with confidence in herself and her decisions much earlier than I did in my own life. I definitely was more 'perpetually in search of' in my early adulthood.

Pugh: I could never be as honestly blunt or as mean as Amy. As much as I love her power and her way of talking, I would find it difficult making people feel bad — even if it was the truth (which is Amy's mantra).

Scanlen: Unlike Beth, if I'm indoors for too long, I'm itching to get out into nature. I also feel that the world makes a little more sense when I write, so in that way, I lean more towards Jo.

Ronan: I reckon I anticipate things a little more than Jo. Maybe can get in my head a little more? It's quite difficult to find differences though because we are very similar! She's a *much* better writer than me!

What was the biggest similarity?

Watson: We're both the older sister to many younger siblings, and that's an undeniably important connection between Meg and I. It's the closest a child can be to understanding their parents' responsibilities, fears, challenges... and that shapes the eldest child tremendously. So, you know, maybe Meg and I both think of 1,000









Clockwise from left: Would-be artist Amy tends to be a divisive character for fans of the source novel; Gentle, caring Beth (Eliza Scanlen); Jo and Laurie are close confidants; A wistful Meg.

reasons *not* to skydive... but also, we both can be easily convinced by the more carefree Jos in our lives. Quite easily convinced :) .

Pugh: Her excitement for life and creativity. Her honesty with her feelings. Amy's ability to passionately laugh and cry all in the same ten minutes. Her total full love for her siblings — I have that in bucketloads too.

Scanlen: I'm only beginning to notice now that I am more of a listener than a talker. I love the stories and the simple company of others.

Ronan: I would say we're both very passionate, expressive; we can both have a temper. We adore our mama.

What is your favourite curse word from *Little Women*? (Such as "capital!" "Christopher Columbus!" "minxes!") Please use it in a modern sentence in a way that would scandalise Aunt March.

Pugh: "I'm going to have a cup of tea and not put a coaster down because I'm a total minx."

Scanlen: I love "chit!", because it's sounds so close to — can I say it here? Either "*Oh, chit!*" or "*piece of chit!*" would work fabulously as you could taunt Aunt March with the fact that there really is no reason to be mad. We're not actually *saying* — I can't say it, can I?

Ronan: "Little chit!" Every time I would say it in the scene, it would sound like I was saying... well, you know. "Look at her, swanning around like she owns the place. She's a right chit, she is."

What is the point of hoop skirts? No, seriously, what is the hoop for? To create a definite perimeter? Because ladies who look like bells are sexy? If you don't know, please make up something entertaining.

Watson: BYOH. Bring Your Own Hoop. Impromptu basketball games, circus tricks, hula hoop contests, rituals etc. It's a versatile object, and when you're wearing it 24/7... hoop, there it is!

Pugh: The point of hoop skirts is to accentuate the lower half of a woman's body because it would (I think) make your baby-making hips seem bigger and more appealing. Which is why you have a corset to pull in your waist and a hoop to enlarge your hips. Creating a super-sexy illusion.

Scanlen: It's a built-in parachute! In case you don't feel like taking the stairs.

Ronan: So, back in the day when it was improper for a lady to stuff her face with food (so sad), she would use the hoop as a secret pocket universe that contained say, an apple, some nuts... a tub of ice cream perhaps during the winter months. Also, not many people know this, but women used to have very sweaty ankles and the 'swish swish' motion of the hoop would supply a gentle breeze to cool the ladies down.

What did you learn from making the film or from the sister you played that you will take with you to your real life?

Watson: *Little Women* made me double down on my deep commitment to Kacey Musgraves' 'Follow Your Arrow'. It's 2019, and it's still "you're damned if you do, and you're damned if you don't" for women and gender non-conforming folk. Playing in the world of four sisters expressing their most natural of human desires for liberation and autonomy further strengthened my resolve for my own.

Pugh: It doesn't hurt to be honest, but know when to stop. It doesn't hurt to be bold, but know you can be weak too. It's okay to realise you want something else and it's okay to be selfish once you've figure that out.

Scanlen: I remember reading in Susan Cain's book, *Quiet*: "There's zero correlation between being the best talker and having the best ideas." As actors we become so accustomed to talking about ourselves and selling ourselves. During interviews, for example, any pause in thought is met with uncertainty. I think there is a remarkably strong resolve and sense of self in those like Beth who are comfortable with quiet, and I try to take that on in my own life.

Ronan: That: "Life is too short to be angry at one's sisters."

***LITTLE WOMEN* IS IN CINEMAS FROM 1 JANUARY**


DOUBLE

WORDS **OLLY RICHARDS**
PORTRAITS **GREG WILLIAMS**
ILLUSTRATIONS **HIDE YOUR TOYS**

WHAMMY

EMILIA CLARKE AND HENRY GOLDING EACH SHOT TO FAME IN A POP-CULTURE PHENOMENON. NOW THEY'RE IN A CHRISTMAS MOVIE INSPIRED BY A WHAM! SONG. IN A FREEWHEELING AND FESTIVE PAIRED INTERVIEW, THE TWO STARS OF LAST CHRISTMAS EXPLAIN WHY IT MAKES PERFECT SENSE



Tom (Henry Golding) and Kate (Emilia Clarke). Forrest Gump just out of shot.

F YOU CAN make a good Christmas movie, you're pretty much set for life. The popular ones — *It's A Wonderful Life*, *Elf*, *Home Alone*, *Love Actually* — go into rotation indefinitely, cramming TV schedules and Secret Santa shopping lists every December. Paul Feig's *Last Christmas* has a pretty solid shot of making that list.

With a script by Emma Thompson and Bryony Kimmings, *Last Christmas* takes, somewhat randomly, the songs of George Michael as inspiration (the title is, of course, lifted from the Wham! Christmas hit). Emilia Clarke plays Kate, a young woman who works in a Christmas shop all year round. She's surrounded by joy, but following a major illness — last Christmas — she's lost her own faith in the world. Then a very handsome stranger, played by Henry Golding, comes along...

It's charming, cheesy and thoroughly likeable, largely thanks to Clarke and Golding, a pair of actors capping off a couple of very big years. She's just finished nearly a decade as Daenerys in *Game Of Thrones* and he's still riding high on the success of *Crazy Rich Asians*. We pinned down the busy pair in London for a chat about stockings, stardom and the next 007.

What's it like making something like this and being stuck in Christmas for months?
Golding: [*Laughs*] The shoot was the longest Christmas ever.
Clarke: We shot before Christmas and after it. And then reshoots in the summer. Which was weird. But mostly it was freezing. There's a montage-y bit, and every time you see me and Henry, we're jumping, trying to get as warm as humanly possible.
Golding: There are points where our faces are just red.
Clarke: I'm used to it because of the show [*Game Of Thrones*]. We shot a lot of cold things where your mouth just stops working.
Golding: We had to sneak in all the exterior shots in December, just before we broke for actual Christmas. And so we were doing these insane splits, where we'd start at 1am and go 'til noon.
Clarke: No member of our very seasoned, very wonderful crew had ever experienced it in their lives. It was a perpetual hangover. That bit when the light's coming up and you feel gross and there's a fucking camera!
Golding: We closed down Piccadilly Circus for a couple of nights and you'd have all these people going past going [*does extremely drunk voice*], "Yeeeeeeaaaaahhh. Paaaarrrttty."

It must become wearing, having to be constantly festive.
Golding: To be honest, this is probably the most enjoyable Christmas I've had.
Clarke: Oh, that's so sweet.
Golding: Just because it's been so very, very Christmassy.
Clarke: The best bit of Christmas is the run-up, the anticipation. Then you're with your family on the day and it's like, "I love you, let's have an argument." So the shoot for this meant I got all the Christmassy build-up for months. This man, unlike me, was not in an elf costume for most of that time, so that rather changes his experience.
Golding: Every single time we came to work, it was just hugs, hot chocolate and laughing.
Clarke: A Paul Feig set is a very happy set. But there was another person that made it extremely joyful: Dame Emma Thompson. The greatest human being on the planet.

[*A very, very green drink is delivered by room service.*]

Clarke: That looks *excessively* healthy. For the tape, Henry is drinking what I can only assume is pond water.
Golding: It's the River Thames' finest.

Enjoy whatever that is. At what point in the year is it appropriate to start watching Christmas movies?
Clarke: If we were American, we would say after Thanksgiving.

But we're not.
Clarke: Correct. I start feeling really Christmassy around the middle of November. I start hoarding presents around then, so I think that's an acceptable time.
Golding: I'm probably only a week or two before.

What's your go-to?
Golding: Mine is *Elf*. But only the first two acts, and then it gets really weird. I like him coming to New York; then it just gets all wacky. Either that or *The Grinch*.
Clarke: For me, Christmas is just an opportunity to watch either *Casablanca* — I know, random — or every Pixar that's ever existed.
Golding: *The Great Escape*, as well. Every Christmas Day that has to be playing at 2.45.



Tree-trimming to the power of ten in elf Kate's Christmas shop.

Clarke: I try a different movie every year, when I'm wrapping presents. But I always end up at *Love Actually*.

Do you have any weird traditions?
Clarke: As me and my brother get older, we have some that start to feel a bit weird. On Christmas morning we'll do stockings. That's where the best presents are!
Golding: I have an old football sock that's stained, from when I was 12 years old. My mum puts, you know, Poundland goodies in.
Clarke: We have the same stocking we had as babies. At the bottom there's always a Terry's Chocolate Orange. That now, as I get older, I physically can't finish the whole fucking thing. And we open it in my parents' bed. Everyone climbs in, with the dog. We'll spend hours doing that.
Golding: As adults? And partners aren't allowed to come?
Clarke: Exactly. One time I had a boyfriend and my brother vetoed him: "He's not allowed in." He had to stay in his own bed.

You both became very famous on what was essentially your first major job. Emilia with *Game Of Thrones* and Henry with *Crazy Rich Asians*. How did you handle that?
Golding: I'm lucky. You were, what, 21?
Clarke: 22.
Golding: I was 30. I had lived a life outside the industry: I'd done fact-based broadcast; I'd been a hairdresser. So I'd been through different iterations of who I was as a human and felt quite level-headed. I take every day as it comes, really.
Clarke: I was just happy to be employed.







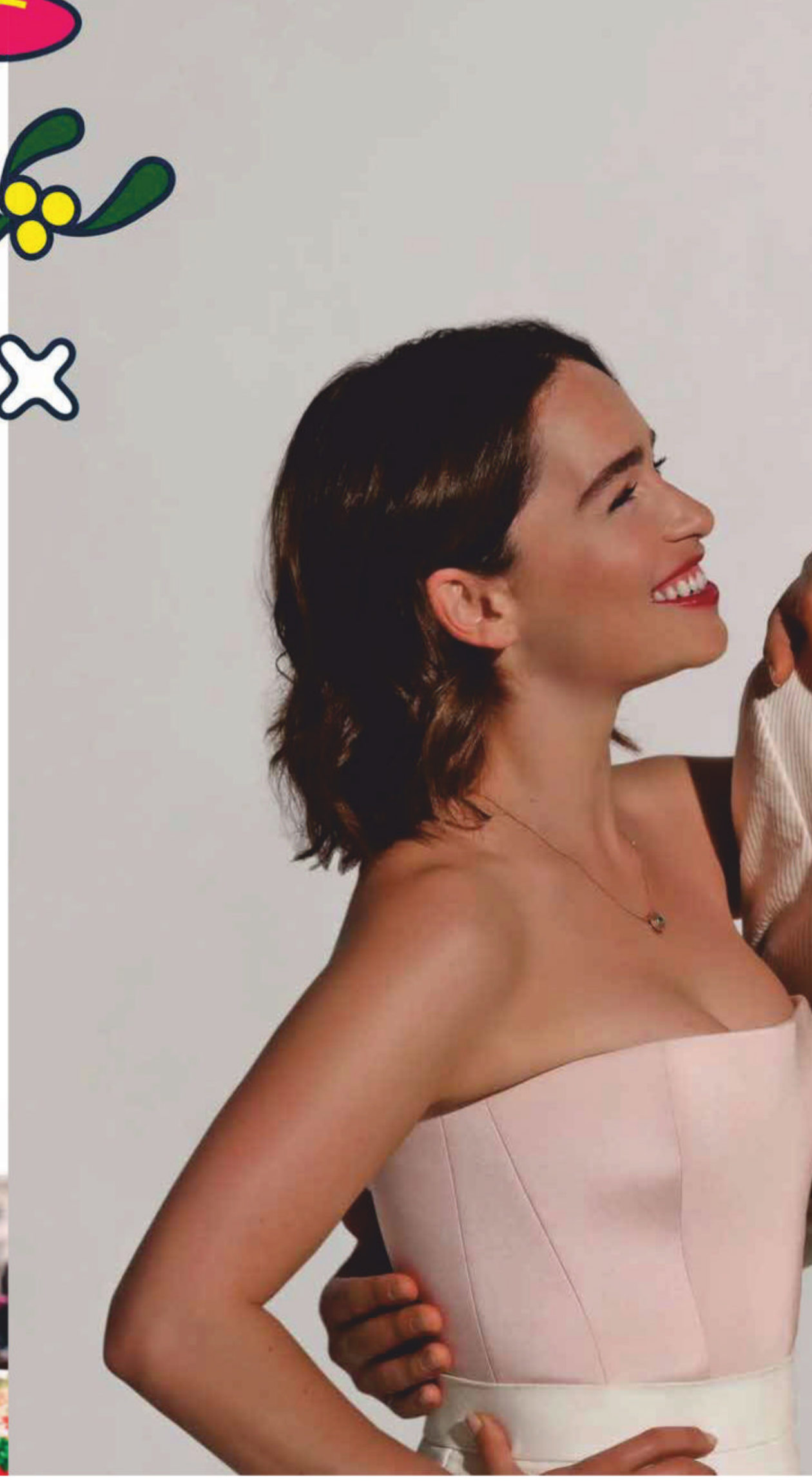
Left, top to bottom: Michelle Yeoh, festived up as Kate's boss; Emma Thompson — who co-wrote the script — plays Kate's mum, Adelia; Covent Garden offers a romantic backdrop.

I dreamed of being an actor, but assumed I'd have to get used to being on the dole. When I got [*Game Of Thrones*] I was just so happy to have a job. Now I can speak about the fact I've had two brain injuries [*Clarke suffered brain aneurysms in 2011 and 2013*], which really affected how I dealt with the success of the show. I don't think I was ever likely to become a crazy, coke-taking fiend, but after a couple of brain haemorrhages, it really grounds you. Honestly, though, it was only really last week that I stopped and thought, "*Game Of Thrones*...was quite a big thing." My brain had never allowed me to think, "You can chill, everything's going to be fine." I always thought it was going to get taken away... We could have fucked up at any point. Some people will probably say we did.
Golding: For me [the way the *Crazy Rich Asians* phenomenon registered] was the response when I was walking around, even in London. When I came to start filming this movie, I was walking round Marylebone and people — even non-Asians — would stop me...
Clarke: "Even non-Asians"!
Golding: Because it was such a big hit. The demographic is really Asian-Americans, but all kinds of people would come up and say it was their favourite film, or the first time their grandparents had been to the cinema in 20 years. That was daily. I realised there were a lot of eyes on this. Then whenever I was on an airplane, which was a lot, every single monitor would be showing it. The stewardesses would come to me and say, "Mr Golding, there's a woman about ›

five rows back, bawling her eyes out watching your movie. I think it's safer if you don't go back there."
Clarke: [*Laughs*] "Don't go into Club, darling! Stay in First!"

You've both recently been the focal point of lively discussions online. Emilia, with the much-debated finale of *Game Of Thrones*...
Clarke: I don't Google anything. If someone says something amazing, I'll be told. If someone says something fucking terrible, I'll be told. I don't need to search. I did that after the first season. I'd Google my name and go, "Wooooooaaaaaah." It would be stuff like, "I can't believe they've got a plus-sized girl on TV." Stuff where I'm just like, "Fuck you." I think I did two years of looking up stuff, then stopped. Don't look at a damn thing... It's lovely when someone says they liked the ending, because we put an unbelievable amount of work into it. It breaks my heart when people don't like the last episode because I care deeply about [show creators] Dan [Weiss] and David [Benioff]. They're two of my closest friends. I get sad for them.

And Henry, there are those rumours you might be cast as the next James Bond. Which you may not be helping to quell with your Sean Connery impression in *Last Christmas*...
Clarke: Yes!
Golding: [*Laughs enigmatically*] I think there's a tremendous amount of space for a new reinvention of Bond. I think it's healthy to have those types of conversations. I'm rooting for Idris [Elba]. I want to see him.



Emilia Clarke and Henry Golding, photographed exclusively for *Empire* in the Corinthia Hotel London on 12 September 2019.



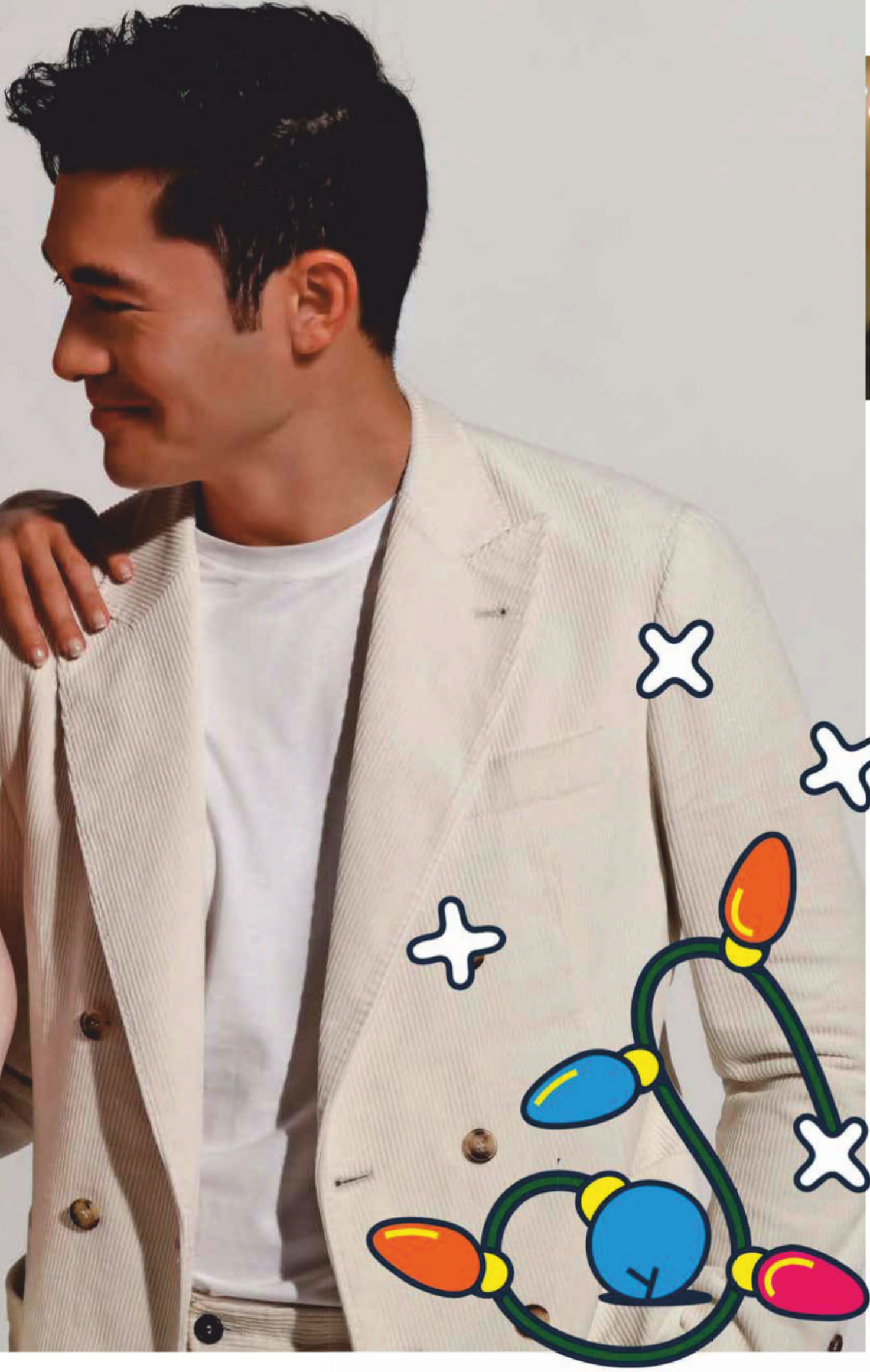
Clarke: But they've chosen the new Bond, haven't they? A woman's been cast? James Bond is a lady.
Golding: As a plot point.
Clarke: So it's not Jane Bond?

Word online is that Lashana Lynch's character [in *No Time To Die*] has taken the 007 codename at the start of the movie, because James Bond is retired.
Clarke: Then she should carry on! I've been arguing for a female Bond for a *veeeery* long time.

Henry, would you do it if it was offered to you?
Golding: Oh...I... [*Laughs*] I think for any actor any franchise as big as that is a gift. I think the people, the creators behind it, have always brought something...so...um...yes.

Emilia, would you do it?
Clarke: Yeah! Of course! Hell to the yeah! James Bond is one of those franchises where it's never not cool. You could literally make the naffest James Bond in the world and it would still be cool.

How do you each decide what to do next, when there's suddenly a tidal wave of opportunities?
Clarke: The wonderful thing about doing something as well-paid as *Game Of Thrones* is that I can do a job for 20p because it's the right filmmaker. Obviously getting paid for doing a job would be lovely, but my single point of focus is working with directors and creators who are inspiring. There's no money in that and I don't want there to be... I'm incredibly lucky.
Golding: As soon as we finished *Crazy Rich*,



Paul [Feig] got hold of me. He's always been one to push forward not only female leads but multicultural actors. He wanted a leading man who was not of a specific ethnicity and he didn't want the film to have to explain it. Now I'm just looking for challenges. My next film [the G.I. Joe spin-off *Snake Eyes*] is more of an action film. And that is something I've always wanted to do.

Clarke: We can have a chat about that. I've got some tips.

Golding: [*Laughs*] That has its own set of challenges, and as an actor you want to feel as though every film makes you better. I'm doing sword training for *Snake Eyes*.

Clarke: I did swords, weirdly, for *Star Wars*.

They're not swords — they're lightsabers.

Clarke: Goddammit! [*Laughs*] I've done everything. Oftentimes, when you're a girl in an action movie, they're like, "You're going to do all this cool stuff!" And then when you get to it they go, "We cut your thing. But you're going to be there. And you're going to look *mean*."



Golding: "*Just pretend!*"

Clarke: [*In disappointed voice*] "But I'm ready to go! I'm primed and pumped!"

The *Crazy Rich Asians* producers have said that two sequels are in the pipeline. When will those be happening?

Golding: The struggle is following in those big footsteps. Jon [M. Chu, director] has been figuring out with the writers how to do that. There are pre-existing books, so how do you balance making a good movie but at the same time follow the expectations of the fans of the books?

Clarke: The honeymoon!

Golding: What, just the two of us in the Bahamas, chilling?

Clarke: That's it. it would be lovely. They all come out and are like, "You're on holiday, too?"

Golding: I like that idea. It's a tough one. I think they definitely need to shoot back-to-back, because Awkwafina has blown up. So has Gemma [Chan]. Constance [Wu] just had *Hustlers* out. Everybody's just...

Clarke: Soaring.

Finally, people tend to freak out when they meet you. But which celebrity has made you freak out when you met them?

Golding: Mine was the photographer Greg Williams. We just shot with him. I'm a huge photography fan and I follow his photography a tremendous amount. At the Oscars, I was in the middle of a conversation with, randomly, Samuel L. Jackson...

Clarke: Excellent name-drop.

Golding: And then I saw Greg and ran over like, "*OhmyGodIamsuchafanofyourwork.*"

Clarke: The story has been out there, but I seriously fangirled Beyoncé.

Golding: What happened there?!

Clarke: Oh God. It was an Oscars after-party and she came up to me and I was pretty far gone at that point — it was quite late in the evening — and I did everything but cry.

Golding: That is amazing.

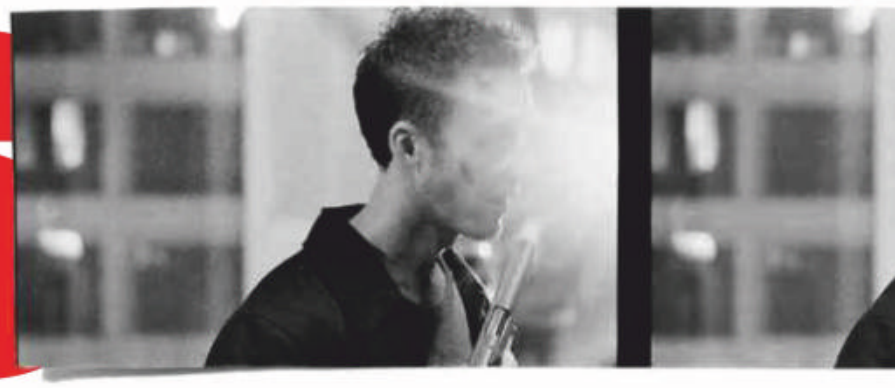
Clarke: I told this story on a talk show, about how badly I'd handled it, and then [shortly after] I was watching basketball in Houston, Texas, and Jay-Z and Beyoncé were there! I was asked if I wanted to meet them. Of course I did. So I'm taken into this room and I'm shaking and then Jay-Z turns to me, as I'm approaching his wife, and goes, "Oooooh! Don't fuck it up this time!" And then I died.

LAST CHRISTMAS IS IN CINEMAS NOW



BREAKING RULES







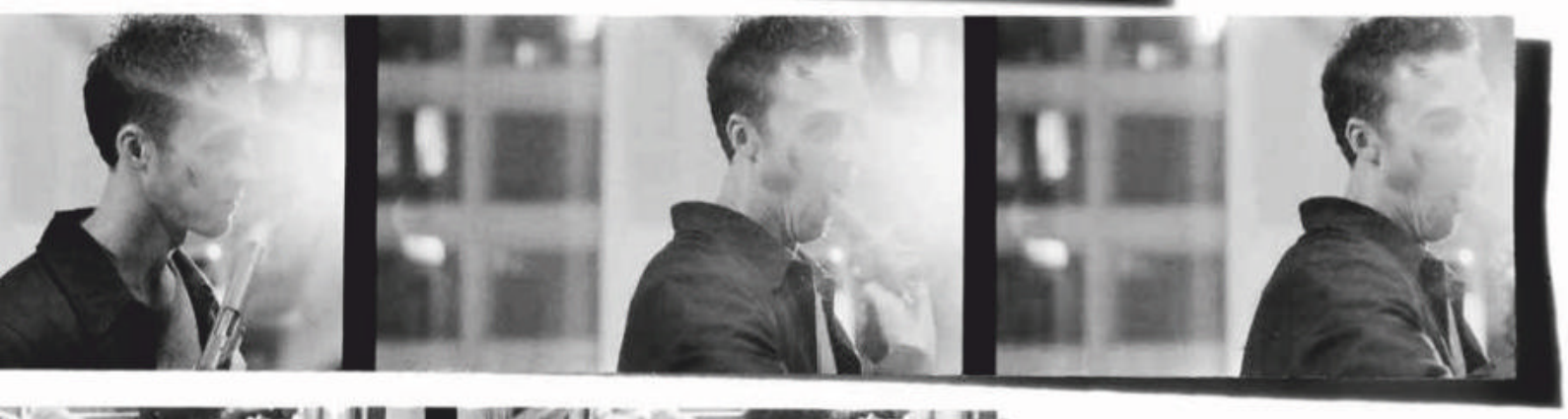








THE









YOU DO NOT TALK ABOUT FIGHT CLUB? TRY TELLING DAVID FINCHER THAT. TWENTY YEARS AFTER THE FILM SMASHED INTO CINEMAS, THE DIRECTOR SHARES TALES AND UNSEEN PHOTOS FROM HIS ARCHIVES

WORDS NEV PIERCE





D

David Fincher didn't think *Fight Club* was violent enough. At least, not until he started showing it to people. "They were alternately horrified and titillated," he tells *Empire*. "Depending on which side of the hallway you stopped after the screening, you were either getting, 'I was really not expecting this and I was taken with it,' or, 'Oh my God, what have you *done*?'"

A lot of critics took the latter view. The gleefully acerbic story of an office drone (Edward Norton's Narrator) inspired by Arctic-cool anarchist Tyler Durden (Brad Pitt) to *feel* through fighting, it smacked eminent noses out of joint. Legendary US critic Roger Ebert called it "the most frankly and cheerfully fascist big-star movie since *Death Wish*". The *Evening Standard*'s Alexander Walker labelled it as "anti-capitalist, anti-society, and, indeed, anti-God". It went down like death at the 1999 Venice Film Festival. Taking their cue from the poor notices, audiences stayed home.

And yet... word spread.

The film became like a secret to be shared — perhaps because it told us not to talk about it, perhaps because it simmered with pre-millennial tension, perhaps because, beating up others and himself and grinning out sly, nihilistic aphorisms, Brad Pitt just looked really fucking cool. And it still distils the zeitgeist today.

"I don't know why we're still talking about it," admits Fincher. "If Chuck [Palahniuk, who wrote the novel] had been angry and not questioning, if he had a thesis that he was ready to expound upon about how unfair shit is, had he truly been the proto-fascist that people misinterpret — the guy who coined the term 'snowflake' — I don't know that we would still be talking about it."

And yet, here we are, in Fincher's Hollywood office, looking through his archive of *Fight Club* photographs and artwork, breaking the first two rules once again. A blown-up version of Walker's damning review hangs on the wall — a reminder of how a consumerist satire and critique of toxic masculinity was taken, by some, as a celebration of it. And, well, a reminder that Fincher quite enjoys provoking people. "I remember fondly going to work to make something we knew people were gonna take issue with," he says, with smile. "It was a fun act of sedition..."





Clockwise from top: *Fight Club*'s Narrator (Edward Norton) gets some shut-eye; Brad Pitt as super-cool soap salesman Tyler Durden; Director David Fincher applies the finishing touches to Norton's 'bloodied' face.

BLOOD WORK

"I'm not putting make-up on Norton. That's somebody else's department. Blood is my department. If you're going to show somebody in their post-mauling moment you have to commit to how much blood's on them. And I normally take the paintbrush for that, because a lot of make-up artists are just too timid. They put a little dot and then they look at you and then they put another dot on and you're like, 'No. He should be *covered* in it.' It's not that I enjoy doing that, but I feel like it just moves it along if the director takes responsibility and goes, 'Hey, here's how much blood he should have on his face!' Then you can start shooting."







Above: David Fincher with Norton. **Left:** Norton, Fincher and producer Art Linson on set.

TALKING BEDS

"Edward asks a lot of questions. And it's his right to. And you better be able to answer them. I think there were definitely some moments where I probably would've liked to have had the trust then that I have from Edward now. It would've helped if I'd had it during the 105 days or so we shot the movie. But — you can see in that sequence of him catching air [after punching himself in the face] — he showed up. He showed *up*. I remember fondly going to work to make something that we knew people were gonna take issue with. It was kind of a fun act of sedition."





WACKING OFF

"I had thought about casting Steven Soderbergh as the Narrator because of *Schizopolis* [the self-reflexive, uncomfortable cult comedy that reinvigorated Soderbergh's career in 1996)]. Weirdly enough, originally, there was a lot of at-work masturbation that the Narrator did. And then, because that was such a moment in *Schizopolis* [Soderbergh, playing a listless office worker, ignores a depressed colleague in order to go and masturbate in the office toilet], I was like, 'If I ask Steven to do this, is he gonna be, "Oh great, I'm the chronic masturbator! Is that what you think?"' So I didn't go there."

ANTI-HERO WORSHIP

"There are people who look at the movie and criticise it for being too enamoured of Tyler Durden. And my attitude is: we're making a movie about a guy who falls under the influence of a charismatic leader. It's your job to make that leader charismatic, right? Otherwise, I mean, is this a 'cautionary tale'? This is the thing that's always terrible about movies about drug addicts: they start off with people doing stuff that's entirely self-destructive — drug addiction starts off with people doing things that are entirely fucking enjoyable and fun — and then it becomes a slippery slope. The secret society in the basement is really a metaphor for drug culture or a certain kind of self-destruction. So it's always strange to me when people say, 'Well, you went too far, because the malleable minds that might see this might be taken with Tyler and his position on things.' And you go, 'Yeah, that's the whole point.' The point is to meet a guy who's going, 'I've done everything that was asked of me and I still feel empty.' And then here comes this guy that goes, 'Well, I don't know, maybe you wanna try X.' And he does. And these other things make him *not* feel empty. They make him feel alive. And then he's willing to move his moral and ethical line for this other person. But there are those people who look at this movie and say, 'No, no, no, you need to be, from the very get-go, telling people that Tyler's way is not the way.' That, for me, was just ridiculous." ›



Here: Brad Pitt with make-up artist Jean Black. **Right:** David Fincher, Helena Bonham Carter and Edward Norton on set.

THREE AMIGOS

"They were a very playful and fun group. Brad is a kind of feline influence. He's like, 'Are all the instincts here aligned?' and, 'Can we now play and find an interesting mistake or a movement or a gesture?' Edward is very much, 'Tell me in advance all the things you want me to hit and let me blow your mind.' And Helena is sort of a blend of the two. She's disciplined and, 'What is it you're trying to get across? Let me work backwards from that a little bit.' Edward had only made a few movies and I think he wanted to get it right. There's a tendency for him to come across as somebody who's trying to contain or control what's happening. But really I think what he wants to know is, 'Where is this thing headed? Let me try and help you get it there.' He has a very different process than the other two. But when they were together, they were a lot of fun. As far as having an intensely watchable and charismatic triumvirate, they were a ball."

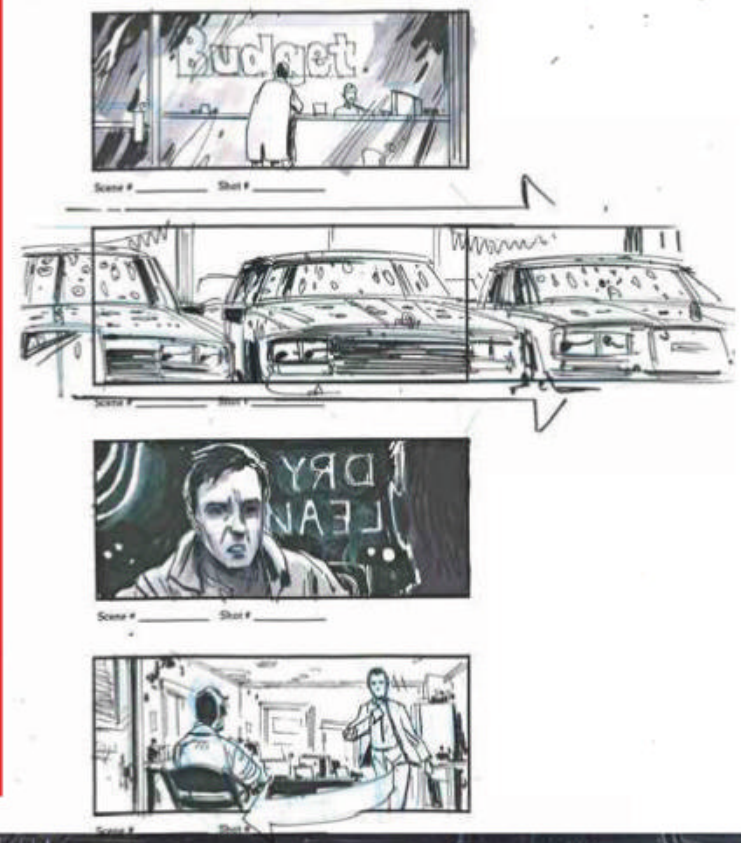
Right: Concept art of the derelict mansion where Tyler, the Narrator and the rest of the Project Mayhem team stay.



HOUSE PARTY

"Almost all the time we were shooting with two cameras, so we're orchestrating this stuff and we got 25-foot boom mics to be able to get from one side of the room to the other. There were calisthenics required to be able to get people talking over there and this person entering and that person. The set of the house was really fucking squeaky and so Brad would go up one flight of stairs and then he'd have to tiptoe across the floor of the next level — but really fast — so he could then come out this other doorway. And then the camera had to swish pan over. It was really fun until you get to like take 17 and you go, 'Oh my God, we're gonna be here all fucking day. We wanted to put the shit together in a oner.'"





Clockwise from left: Storyboards of Lou's Tavern; The Fight Club in the tavern's basement; Watching the rushes; Tyler and Marla.



ALL ABOARD

"We storyboarded most of the movie. I basically wanted [Fox honcho] Bill Mechanic to see that we had done prep. We knew the movie that we were making. He could flip through the comic book, ostensibly, of the thing and see the size of the movie we were making. Most of the time you don't get the chance to do that kind of work. I did it mostly out of respect for Bill and Arnon's [Milchan, producer and financier] money and [the late president of Fox 2000] Laura Ziskin's process. She wanted to put them at ease, 'cause she really wanted to make the movie. They could look at it and go, 'Oh, I see, there's a lot of fucking shots. And they're all very specific to the story that's being told.' So it was designed to put people at ease. For the most part, it worked. Of course, just as often, professionals have no confidence you're actually gonna stick to the plan. But we did. We pretty much shot the board."



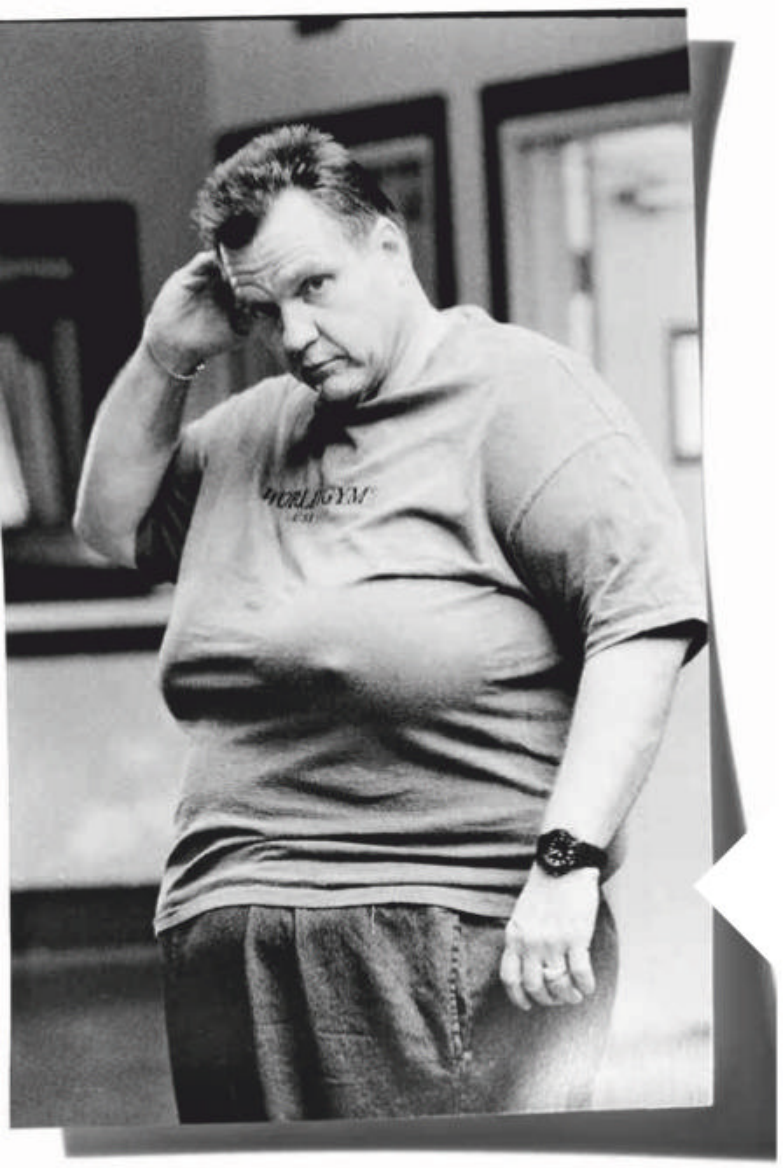


CROSSING THE LINE

"Laura Ziskin was extremely supportive. She asked a lot of questions, but I never felt she was asking them to get me to rethink my position. I think she just wanted to know how committed I was. We talked about the line, 'I want to have your abortion,' and how incendiary that might be. And we agreed that the text was the text and part of the reason why this book was a cult phenomenon was because it took those kinds of chances. That was enough until we shot the line. I think she just got squeamish. We previewed it once and it got audible groans. She came up to me and said, 'You have to get rid of it.' I took a little bit of umbrage and said, 'If we do this, I can't have this conversation again.' She said, 'I don't care what you do. Just do anything other than, 'I wanna have your abortion.'"

"So we were reshooting and just needed this shot down onto a mattress [for the replacement line, 'I haven't been fucked like that since grade school']. We were like, 'Wherever we end up on day six, we'll drop the mattress, light the thing.' And it turned out it was in the rectory of a church. And it was only in that moment that Helena [Bonham Carter, as Tyler's lover Marla] said to me, 'I don't know if I can say this line!' I was like, 'Get in there and say the fucking line!'"

"When we showed Laura she begged me, 'Please go back to the abortion line.' I was like, 'No. Too late!' But she was cool about it. She was like, 'Okay, I should have known better than to complain.'" ›





Above: Meat Loaf, sporting bird seed, as steroid abuser Robert 'Bob' Paulson. **Top right:** Bob and the rest of the 'dancing waiters' prepare for Project Mayhem.

WHAT ABOUT BOB?

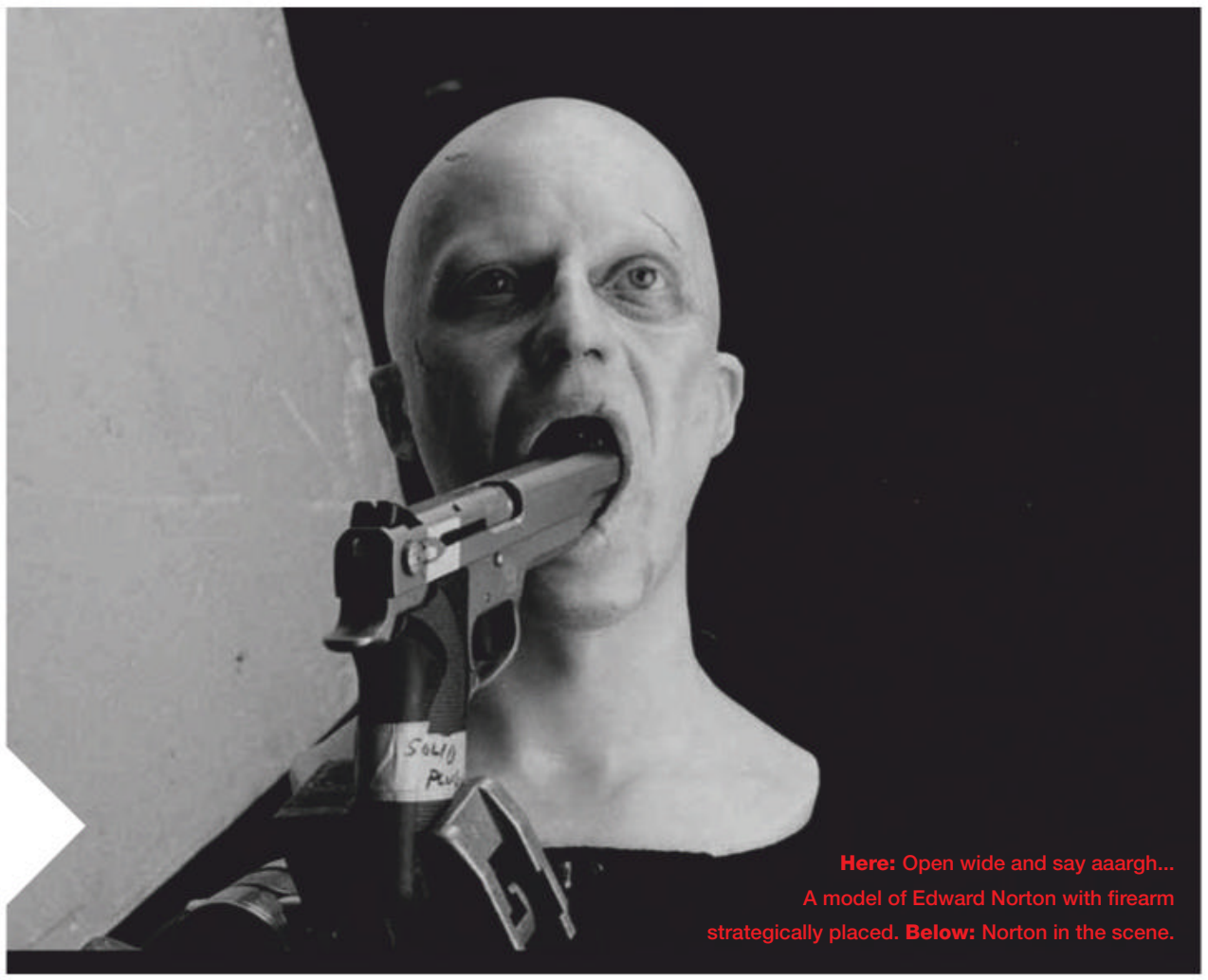
"I had met Mr Aday [aka Meat Loaf] years ago, when I was going to do a music video, and I was struck by how positive he was. You remember him as this guy in a ruffled shirt, just pouring with sweat, singing his balls off, yet when you meet him he's as playful as a fucking kitten. And he's very funny. And he has a sort of ebullience that you can't fake. And we were looking for 'Bob' — you gotta have a guy who becomes entirely memorable as the most generic name of all time. Who can we get to play Bob? And in comes Meat Loaf and I was like, 'Dude, you gotta be in this movie.' Ironically he had lost all this weight. We had been like, 'Meat Loaf could be good, because it could look like he has that thing where people suddenly get off steroids.' Then he shows up and he's skinnier than me. And ends up wearing this [fat]suit full of bird seed. It was brutal. He would sweat through that thing. He was carrying around 90lb of bird seed."

BEST SNIDE STORY

"Somebody said, 'Look, we're Droogs!' And I said, 'You're not Droogs. You guys are more like the Jets [from *West Side Story*], the regional theatre version of the Jets!' So the next day they all came out dancing, doing their best Jerome Robbins [*West Side Story*'s choreographer]. Aesthetically, it was not very pleasant."

GUN CRAZY

"We fucked this up a couple of times. It never quite came off the way it was supposed to. Today we would do it all in CG and at the time there just wasn't the resolution. There were so many tools that we didn't have then that we have now. We had a bunch of elements, from a gun that had a little flashbulb in it, to a little pipe that was almost like a dart gun and you shoot air into his mouth to fill his cheeks. But I really wanted to get that Dizzy Gillespie cheeks-puffed-out-like-crazy look. We never quite got it right."



Here: Open wide and say aaargh... A model of Edward Norton with firearm strategically placed. **Below:** Norton in the scene.



Fight Club archive material courtesy of David Fincher. Black and white photography by Merrick Morton. Special thanks to Ceán Chaffin and Andrea McKee. Still life: Marco Vittur



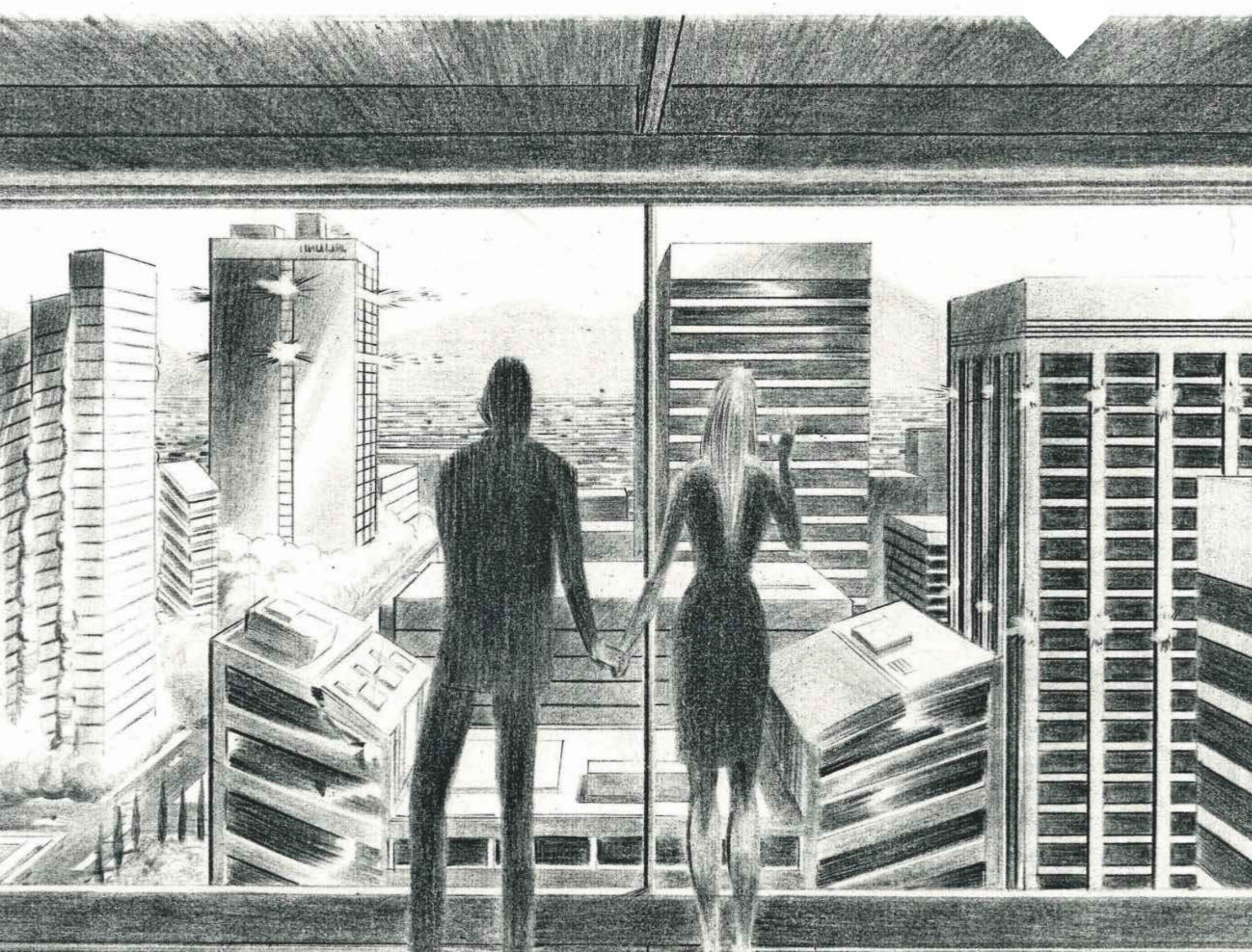
ON THE OFFENCE

"When the movie was assembled I felt like it was too tame. Granted, this was before [sound designer] Ren Klyce got a hold of it and started adding all the pork bellies being crushed with ball-peen hammers and stuff. And then, when the reviews came out, I was like, 'Oh, maybe I don't have the barometer for this thing!' Because people were so offended. And I never felt that the film was *that* offensive. I always thought it was peeking over the fence at offensive. But I never thought that we'd actually climbed the fence. Poor Alexander Walker."

Above: Biff! Bang! Pow! Tyler and the Narrator come to blows. **Below:** Concept art of the Narrator and Marla, hand in hand, at Project Mayhem's deadly dénouement.

WHERE IS MY MIND?

"For the first couple years after it came out there were so many people who, if we were going to discuss that movie, had to discuss it in terms of the punitive lessons that I needed to learn about being responsible to investors and being responsible to an audience. And I was never really comfortable having that conversation about, 'Why was I so self-involved that I thought the world should see something like this?' But I got over that pretty quickly. I stopped. And I stopped getting involved in those kinds of conversations."



THE PEOPLE VS. DAVID FINCHER

FROM HIS LOVE OF MUSIC VIDEOS TO HIS AVERSION TO iPHONES, THE WORLD'S MOST METICULOUS DIRECTOR ANSWERS YOUR QUESTIONS

WORDS **NEV PIERCE**
ILLUSTRATION **JAMES DAWE**





What is your biggest pet peeve on set?

MATT WILLIAMS

I think it's hard for people to understand how little, incidental conversation just takes away from focus. Everybody just goes into pause mode instead of record mode. Also, when you shoot a lot of takes, as people do stuff repetitively, you see in your peripheral vision people go to their iPhones. Might be the iPhone on set — biggest pet peeve.

If you could remake any film in history, which would it be?

PAUL LEACH

I never thought about it. I mean, there are some films I feel like, "That was a great two-thirds of an idea and it didn't stick the landing." Some of those films I've actually made.

Whatever happened to your Arthur C. Clarke project *Rendezvous With Rama*?

STEVE DEMPSTER

It was a gigantic, expensive movie that didn't have any toys. There were no amusement-park rides that could be gleaned from it.

Who has been your main inspiration as a film director?

JANE BASS

So many. Obviously George Roy Hill, Alfred Hitchcock, Roman Polanski, Steven Spielberg, Alan Pakula and Bob Fosse. All the normal greats. Hal Ashby. All the people that you would guess.

Which emerging filmmakers do you admire and why?

DYLAN JOHN

There's a lot. When you're 12 years old and you haven't seen 3,000 movies, you're susceptible to the thing that's going on that's narratively essential. Then at a certain point you've seen so many stories that you can kind of go, "I have an idea where this is headed." I think what's interesting about emerging filmmakers is you thought you'd seen every approach to the dive, you thought you'd seen every set-up, and then you see something new. But I don't wanna name any names 'cause then you get into that whole, "Why didn't you say me?"

From Kristen Stewart to Rooney Mara and Jonathan Groff, you've given leading roles to relatively little-known actors, who have excelled. What do you look for?

MATTHEW HOPE

I look for actors who are ready to go to work. And I like actors who are curious and wanna try stuff. All three of these people had done it before. Kristen Stewart, I think that [*Panic Room*] was her second movie. And I'd already worked with Rooney [on *The Social Network* before *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo*]. Jonathan was just somebody that I'd seen audition [for Sean Parker in *The Social Network*] and was like, "I can't let him get away twice." But mostly you're looking for somebody who wants to be there and wants to work to unwrap something. I mean, there are definitely actors that you cast for a role where you know what you're gonna get. You know, I'm hiring this guy because he brings this and the audience has an understanding of what to expect from them and I can either play into that or I can play against that. But casting younger actors is always fun. With *The Social Network* there was no expectation that we had to put together the *Ocean's Eleven* cast. We could just go and get fabulous, fresh-faced enthusiasts that wanted to be there. As I get older I find myself being drawn to people that I'm rooting for, people that I want to see succeed. That's certainly the case with those three names.

I love the opening credits to *Seven*. What's your favourite opening-credits sequence of all time?

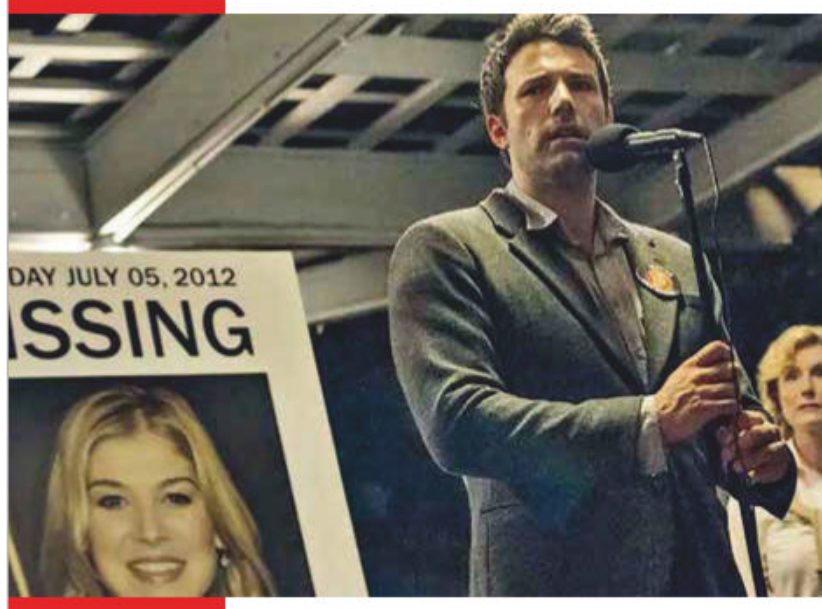
NEIL RENTON

Well, *Seven*'s one of them. *Alien*, probably. The early [Richard] Greenberg stuff. *Butch Cassidy And The Sundance Kid* has a great opening-title sequence that was never intended to be the title sequence. To start something with the silent-movie version and then to go into the reclaiming of the American Western, but also kind of the first buddy movie, I gotta say that's a pretty great one. And all the Hitchcock stuff is pretty amazing.

Given your involvement in *House Of Cards* and *Mindhunter*, which of your films do you think would make a great TV series and why?

IAN HUNTER

I suppose *Mindhunter* is an extension of a lot of





Top to bottom: Brad Pitt, Kevin Spacey and Morgan Freeman march towards *Seven*'s dénouement; Nick's (Ben Affleck) public plea in *Gone Girl*; Rooney Mara as Lisbeth Salander in 2011's *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo*.

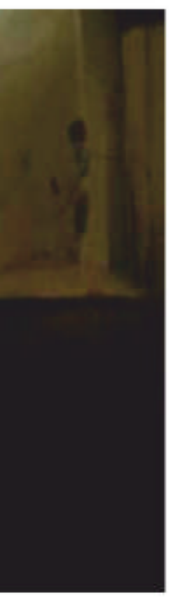




Right: FBI agents Bill Tench (Holt McCallany) and Holden Ford (Jonathan Groff) in Netflix's *Mindhunter.* **Below:** Rooney Mara and Jesse Eisenberg in 2010's *The Social Network*.







Alamy, Allstar

the thinking about what makes a scene, or what makes drama, that I had about *Zodiac*. In trying to take something that probably would've been a pretty good five-hour movie and get it down to two hours and 45 minutes, we kind of made it too long on one hand and not deep enough on another. I think the criteria for me is if something is very narratively focused it's probably good, fertile ground for growing a movie. And if something is much more about getting to know the people and seeing their hypocrisies and foibles and strengths and weaknesses, then probably television. I mean... perhaps *Fight Club*. I think Chuck Palahniuk's characters are so rich and dense and layered and faceted. Certainly 80 per cent of his other writings would make amazing mini-series, if nothing else.

I think your style would really suit a James Bond film. Is it something you've ever considered or been offered before?

SCOTT HUNT

I talked about doing a James Bond movie. I think it was in and around *GoldenEye*. But, no, I don't think I would flourish in that environment.

As most of your films have a darkly comedic edge, have you ever considered making an out-and-out comedy?

MARK WILLIAMS

No, not an out-and-out comedy. I think that when you're making films that have a lot of... depravity, and are about serious subjects, you have to temper that. I mean, *Fight Club* is satire and *Gone Girl* is satire, so the comic side of that is not one of necessarily going, "Wah-wah-wahhh." You're not doling out jokes. So if that's what you mean by out-and-out comedy, no. I mean, I would love to read a script of *Being There*, had it not been made, and make something like that. But I guess that's satire, too. I find a lot of comedy, with air quotes, to be a little obsequious.

Of all the musicians you shot videos with, whose life would make the most interesting movie? (Surely Johnny Hates Jazz will be your top choice!)

MATTHEW CAVILL

Matt, you slay. I don't know. I mean, Iggy Pop for sure would be one. Kevin Hunter [of the band Wire Train] is pretty interesting, too. I wonder what he's doing? But, no, I don't know that Johnny Hates Jazz would be my top choice...

Can we please get a David Fincher *Star Wars* or MCU movie?

MATTHEW ROUSE

Yeah, can we?

How do you feel about the current studio climate where the mid-budget films you're famous for are now so difficult to get made?

JAMES STEELE

They have never been easy to get made. I don't think that for so many years it was knees akimbo to get your weird $60 million dramas made. What Netflix has made possible is for people to still give attention to things that are in the $30-$50 million range, instead of just splitting the world down the middle, between a $200-million or $14-million movie. I like enough money to get into trouble and not enough money that you get hurt if it doesn't do $60 million its opening weekend.

What is it about shorts and music videos that continues to interest you?

JOSH CRAWFORD

I think whenever you are tested to come up with something that's sort of cogent and arresting, it's a great way to work on your backhand.

Fairly early in your career the term 'Fincher-esque' was coined. Has that ever felt limiting, in terms of audience and critic expectations of you?

ALEX RICHARDSON

'Fincher-esque' makes me a little queasy. Although I think it's a good thing to have an audience have some expectation of you because it gives you opportunities to subvert that. When you're making a movie like *Gone Girl*, it's not a bad thing that people have seen *Seven* and know that shit can go seriously off the rails. The threat of that is actually kind of positive. You get to play with expectations. It's your responsibility to be aware of that and use it to your advantage, as opposed to letting it get in the way of the story you're trying to tell.

FBI agent Holden Ford, Jonathan Groff's character in *Mindhunter*, can be a bit of a prick — is making a show around an awkward character a challenge?

BEN STEINER

Is he a prick? He's sometimes a bit of a prick but I also relate to him and to the times when he protects himself or I can see his hubris. We play with that a lot. But I don't think of him as a prick — I think of him as young, you know? He's not an awkward character, he's a character who has awkward moments. But he also has moments where he's wildly articulate and fires up people to make changes. So I think he's an engaging, not heroic, character, but an interesting character to follow.

Given you made *The Social Network* — about basically the most awful comparison tool in existence — do you ever compare yourself to other people, professionally or personally?

MICHAEL MILES

No. It's just gonna make me depressed.

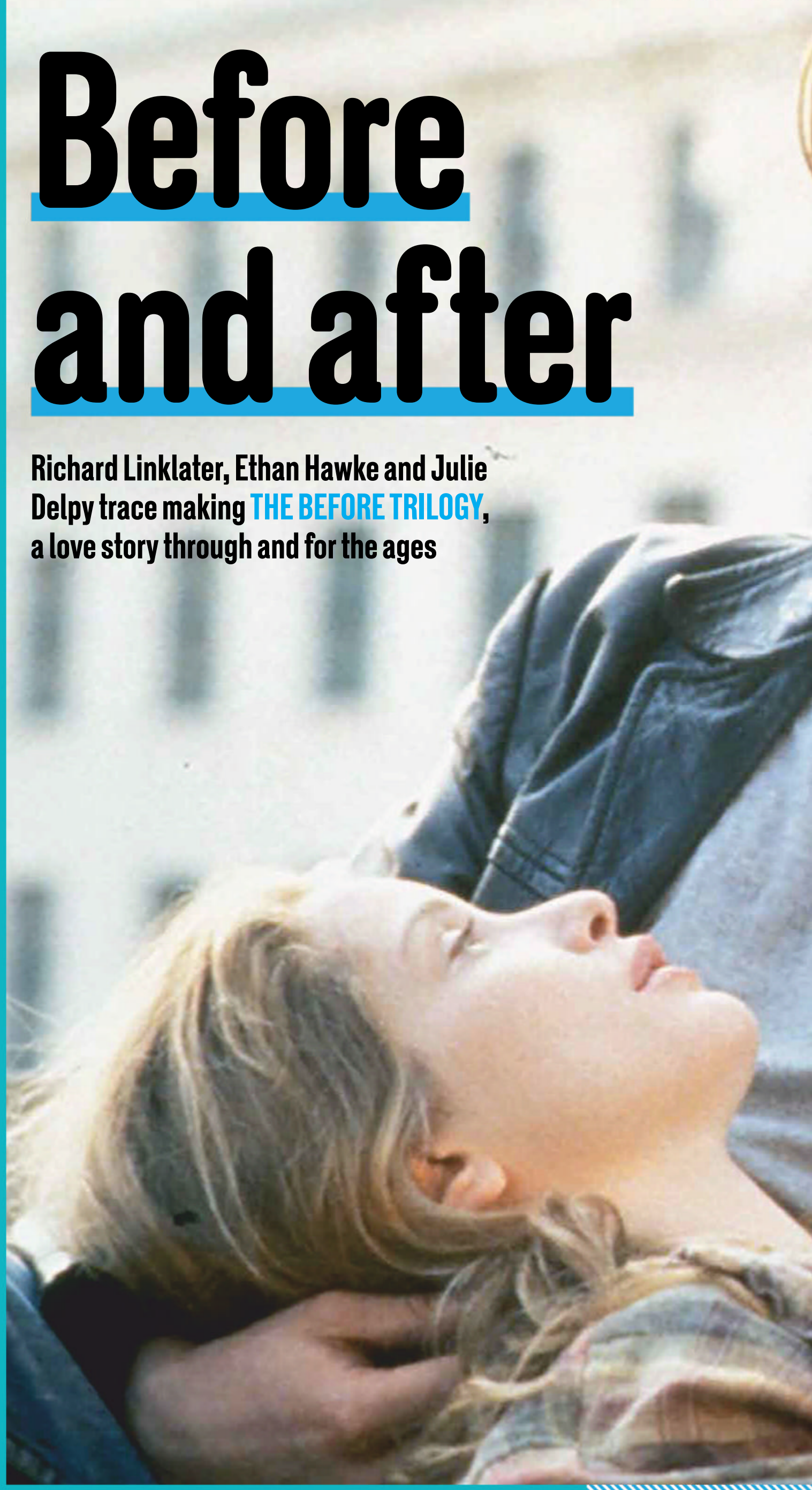
VIEW

SPOILER WARNING

INDISPENSABLE HOME ENTERTAINMENT [EDITED BY CHRIS HEWITT]

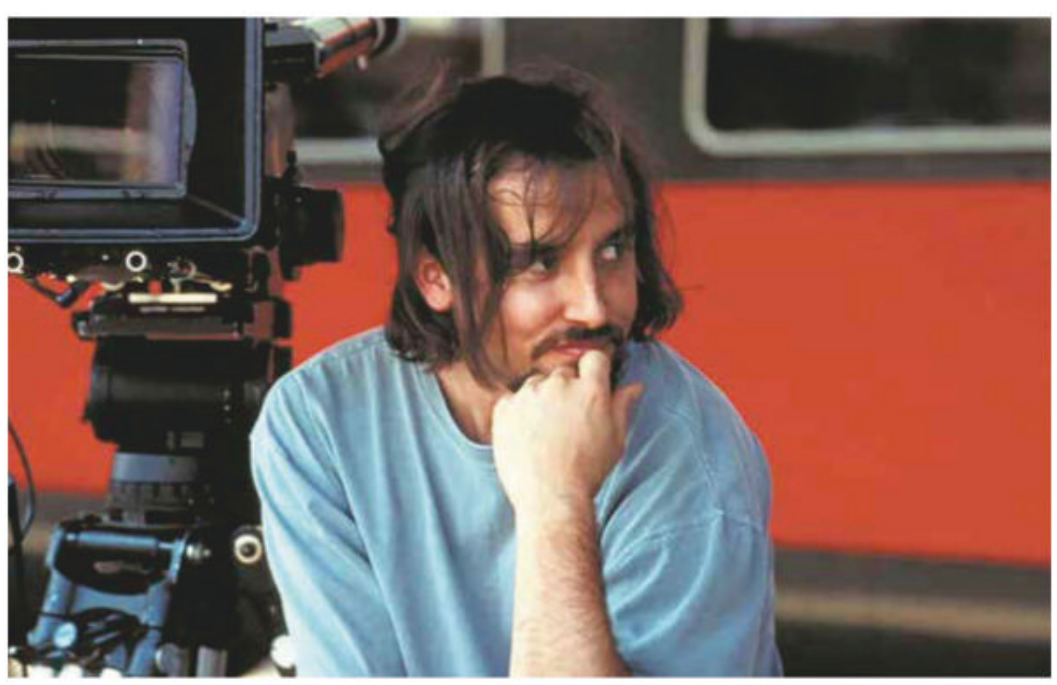
Before and after

Richard Linklater, Ethan Hawke and Julie Delpy trace making THE BEFORE TRILOGY, a love story through and for the ages





How it all started: Ethan Hawke and Julie Delpy in *Before Sunrise*. **Below:** Director and co-writer Richard Linklater on set in 1994.



BEFORE SUNRISE (1995)

IN OCTOBER 1989, 29-year-old Richard Linklater entered a toy shop in Philadelphia and met Amy Lehrhaupt serving behind the counter. The pair sparked and spent the evening walking and talking around the city — and then went their separate ways. The night inspired *Before Sunrise* (1995), starring Ethan Hawke and Julie Delpy as US slacker Jesse and French student Celine, who meet on a train bound for Paris, get off at Vienna and fall in love before our eyes. Marked by a unique collaboration between director and actors, who shaped the script through controlled improv, the film birthed the greatest romance in modern movies, spawning two unlikely sequels, *Before Sunset* (2004) and *Before Midnight* (2013), at neat nine-year intervals. As the three films bow on Criterion UK, Linklater, Hawke and Delpy reflect on what the director calls an "accidental trilogy".

Ethan Hawke (co-writer/Jesse): Rick has this great sensibility where he has never been in a gunfight or a helicopter crash or been involved in international espionage but feels like his life has been full of drama. Contemporary movies make you feel like your life is so boring. He said, "I want to make a movie that makes you feel like your own life is pretty thrilling because it feels thrilling to live it, to connect with another human being."

Richard Linklater (co-writer/director): I wanted to take what I had done with the big casts in *Slacker* and *Dazed And Confused* and work in small ways; work with someone on a scene, rewrite it, find new humour and find new things via the actor. I just wanted to simplify and make something really intimate with that same methodology.

Julie Delpy (co-writer/Celine): We all write all the characters. I am not just the female voice. I'm sometimes the male voice. That's the thing that's exciting about it.

Hawke: In the first 15 minutes of *Before Sunrise*, I have ten times more lines than I have in the whole of *The Magnificent Seven* or *Training Day*. We had these huge monologues. You'd spend your whole frickin' Sunday running lines.

Delpy: The first one was hard because it was a night shoot and I'm not a night person at all.

Hawke: I remember there was one day when Julie said [*adopts French accent*], "Rick, zis film is going to be *so* boring. We need to write some jokes." Richard said, 'I have been sitting watching you in Vienna for a month-and-a-half and I haven't been bored for one minute. So if somebody is going to be bored in a two-hour film, they are not our audience. Fuck them!"

At 32 minutes, the couple share their first kiss on the Ferris wheel at the Prater amusement park made famous by The Third Man.

Hawke: Julie was miserable on that Ferris wheel. "*Oh my God, it's going to break! We're going to die.*" I remember kissing her and she told me I kissed like an adolescent. ›

Delpy: I love to bug him. He doesn't hold the grudge very long.
Linklater: The core premise was they decide not to meet up again. The farther we got, I remember thinking, "I don't believe that anymore." So we worked at it and found the right note of, "Okay, we won't run off together now but we'll meet together in six months." We came up with that in the last week — that wasn't there before.

The film won Linklater a Silver Bear for Best Director at Berlin and received critical raves, but took years to find an audience, earning a measly $1.3 million on opening weekend.

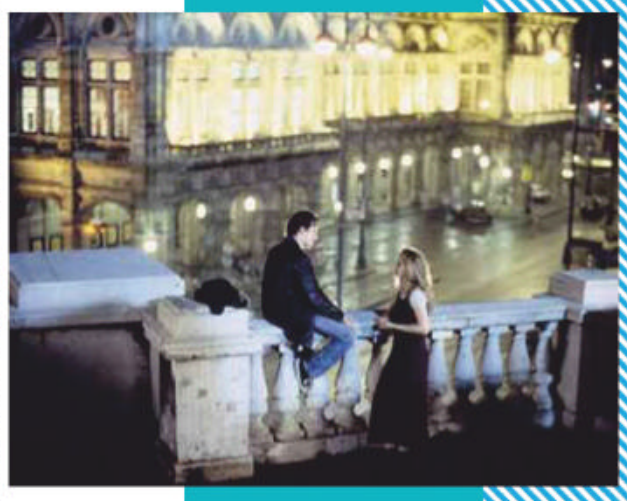
Linklater: I thought it was the best version of itself. Castle Rock had a hit with *Four Weddings And A Funeral*. So you go, "Well, a romantic film can do pretty well. You never know."
Delpy: I was happy with a lot of what I put in the film as a writer. People pointed out certain things I had written. So for me it was like, "My romantic ideas are not just a young girl's ideas, they resonate with other people."
Linklater: Ethan was on the cover of *Rolling Stone* around that time. I remember standing in an airport thumbing through magazines, and there were these two young ladies. One says, "Ethan is in a new movie." "'Have you seen that yet?" "Uh, yeah. It's pretty boring." I was like, "That's the American public right there."
Hawke: I was really disappointed that the movie didn't do well and people didn't really get it when it first came out. It's not commercial material. I think they were hoping "from the maker of *Slacker* and the star of *Reality Bites*" meant some kind of Gen X sensation. I loved the movie but there's certainly a lot of people who thought the movie was boring when it first came out. Julie was not wrong.

Linklater later learned Amy Lehrhaupt, the story's inspiration, was killed in a motorcycle accident just as Before Sunrise *started shooting. The filmmaker dedicated* Before Midnight *to her.*

Linklater: It's just crushing. Even though we had drifted I always thought I would see her again. But in some strange way it made sense. For all their youth, the first one has a certain mortality in the air and that kind of permeates the movie. Maybe she was with us that whole time.

BEFORE SUNSET (2004)

Jesse and Celine laid low until Hawke and Delpy reprised the roles in Linklater's dream-like animated flick Waking Life *(not canon). Still, the five-minute scene stirred something in the trio and they devised a meeting between Jesse and Celine at a French bookshop where Jesse is promoting his new book, the story of* Before Sunrise. Sunset *subsequently follows the pair around Paris in real time until Jesse catches his plane. Or does he?*







Top to bottom: Vienna is all romance in *Before Sunrise*; Linklater, Delpy and Hawke work on the script for *Before Sunset*; Jesse and Celine reconnect in Paris.



Hawke: I was scared about doing a sequel but I had no doubt I wanted to do it. I remember Scott Derrickson, who directed me in *Sinister*, telling me he was so mad at us for making a sequel. He resents the idea so much I don't think he's ever seen the other two.
Linklater: We always joke *Before Sunrise* is the lowest-grossing film to earn a sequel.
Hawke: It's also the lowest-grossing trilogy of all time.
Delpy: When I started writing *Before Sunset* with the guys, I had an agent at the time. I told him, "I am not going to go to the audition for *Rush Hour 2* playing the sexy Latina because it's a waste of time. I am going to go write a screenplay with friends, a sequel to a film." Two days later, he called me and said, "We've dropped you at the agency because you are wasting your time writing a sequel to a movie that no-one cares about. Goodbye." I was like, "Okay, goodbye."
Hawke: The hardest part was the writing. The thing about *Before Sunrise* is everybody loves youth, everybody loves possibility. You cross 30 and you start getting into serious adult conversations and the bloom of youth is leaving. It becomes hard to make that romantic.



Linklater (with injured leg) chats with Hawke and Delpy between scenes on *Before Midnight*. **Below:** Celine with her and Jesse's twin daughters.

Linklater: In a way, the second one was the purest. Julie was so at home; we were on her turf. We just had a great time.
Hawke: The second one was even more magical to make than the first. Julie and I were older, more mature. We got along even better. I was going through a divorce [from Uma Thurman] that was really, really sad. It was a very healing summer to be in Paris and revisit this time period in my life that had been so wonderful.
Linklater: Julie and Ethan don't get credit as actors for what they're actually doing.
Delpy: The toughest scenes are not the emotional scenes, it's the most middle-of-the-road scenes. Walking and talking and being natural — that's the shit that's hard!

Sunset *became a bigger hit than* Sunrise *($16 million worldwide) and earned an Oscar nomination for Best Adapted Screenplay.*

Hawke: I remember there was a poster for *Before Sunset*. One of my friends said, "Did you actually do another one of those movies? Wow, you guys really believe in yourselves, don't you?"
Delpy: After the film was quite successful for an indie film, I remember bumping into my former agent and he said, "Oh, we were so sad when you decided to leave the agency." I was like, "What?!" It's like Trump. People who feed their own fantasy to not recognise their mistake. It's hilarious.



BEFORE MIDNIGHT (2013)

Despite Oscar recognition, it took another nine years to revisit the couple. Fortysomething and together, they're on holiday in Greece, and trying to keep the relationship alive in the midst of angst about her career and his son.

Hawke: I felt very strongly we made two movies about romantic projection, and I wanted to make one that dealt with romantic reality — a movie about middle-aged people with children that was romantic but didn't have one lie in it.
Linklater: On *Sunset*, we were able to write remotely, emails, editing each other's stuff. On *Midnight*, I wasn't getting much done. So it was like, "We all have to get in the room together." So we went to Greece six, seven weeks early.
Delpy: The writing period in Greece was a lot of fun. We would write all day, then at 6pm go and swim in the sea and look at the sunset. We talked *a lot* about sex during our writing sessions. It's interesting that the writing sessions are very different from the films because we get out all our jokes and bullshit and really have fun. But what comes out is not superficial.

The film builds to a huge argument as the fault lines in Jesse and Celine's relationship crack open.

Linklater: For the fight scene I studied the Ali-Frazier fight from 1971. No, I'm kidding.
Hawke: That's the hardest thing the three of us have done together — a 30-page scene that takes place in one room. They call it the Argument Scene but we always try to call it the Love Scene. The scene starts and they are going to make love and it gets worse and worse.
Delpy: I came up with the "kissy-kissy, titty-titty, *pussy*" line [it's the order in which Jesse always makes love to Celine]. When it's the word "pussy" it's usually coming from me because I am less nervous about saying that word than Richard and Ethan are.
Linklater: We rehearsed the hell out of it. It was so choreographed. Julie was like, "If you're ever going to show my boobs, you'd better do it now."
Delpy: I was pissed off. Usually my breasts look great but of course the air-conditioning broke that day and it was so hot my breasts were falling to my knees.
Hawke: Acting that scene was really fun. You don't often get that kind of scene-work.
Delpy: How do you make it exciting when people have been together a while but they are still connecting on so many levels? Argument is connection. That was a very important scene to all three of us, to create something exciting to watch for 18 minutes of people arguing.
Hawke: That was so much work; writing those things, memorising those lines, yelling at each other. The wrap party after *Before Midnight* was as tired as I've ever been. I was exhausted. I remember getting on the plane saying, "I am never working with you two people again." And I say that with all love. I wasn't mad at them.
Linklater: It's now six years but we never signed up and said, "Hey, we're going to do one of these things every nine years for the rest of our lives." It was a total accidental trilogy in the first place.
Hawke: There's something that appears very complete to me about the three films together. But Rick has an idea to use Jesse and Celine to start a different story in a different part of life — obviously they'd be connected but it would be its own thing. For the first time since we wrapped *Before Midnight*, I've been thinking we might actually do this. It could have a very cool title. It could just be 'B4'.
Linklater: Or we could switch to 'After...'
Delpy: Or how about 'Before We Kill Each Other'?

IAN FREER

***THE BEFORE TRILOGY* IS OUT NOW ON CRITERION BLU-RAY**

Alamy, Allstar, Capital Pictures, MPTV, Photofest

The Accidental Trilogy

Director ASIF KAPADIA on the subjects of his three 'outsiders' documentaries — Ayrton Senna, Amy Winehouse and, most recently, Diego Maradona

"I'M AN ACCIDENTAL trilogist," laughs Asif Kapadia. "Well, I'm an accidental documentary filmmaker!" There's truth in that. When Kapadia, the director of fiction feature films such as *The Warrior* and *Far North*, turned his hand to documentaries with 2010's *Senna*, the story of the life and death of the great Formula 1 driver Ayrton Senna, "it was a one-off as far as I was concerned." But the universe had other plans and now, almost a decade later, Kapadia finds himself the director of two more documentaries — *Amy*, the story of the tragic life of Amy Winehouse, which won him an Oscar; and now *Diego Maradona*, which focuses on a brief period in the life of the most controversial, and arguably best, footballer of all time, as he grappled with addiction and inner darkness while inspiring Napoli and Argentina to glory. Kapadia sees clear parallels between these three very different people from vastly different backgrounds — "They're all outsiders, they're all fighting against the system. In a way they kind of became gods, they became mythic." And here he talks us through each.

1 SENNA (2010)

"On *Senna*, we were discovering the form. I was making up a way of making a film. I'd never done a doco [before]. And this idea of doing it solely with archive footage, where you take the footage that essentially has been seen by everyone on TV, and you do interviews but don't do talking heads, nobody really believed in at the time. I needed to get people to buy into the concept that this actually is a movie. Now, over the three films, it's gone from, 'What the hell is this guy doing?' to almost becoming the industry norm. It was a hard one because I went in there thinking, 'How do you make this interesting?' He's in a car. He drives around in circles. He's wearing a suit. He's got a helmet. You can't see his eyes. I can't interview him. But when he did speak, he was so eloquent, so intelligent. In two or three languages he could explain everything that was in his heart and mind. And the spiritual element became a big part of it. He had belief and faith. He knew what he stood for, and he went for it. But that almost means you have to sacrifice yourself."

2 AMY (2015)

"*Senna* was really hard. I'm really proud of the film but I thought, 'I'm never going to do that again.' I got offered quite a few things, including the chance to do the Diego





Above: Footballing icon Diego Maradona gets a hero's welcome from 70,000 fans at Stadio San Paolo in Naples in 1987. **Right:** Director Asif Kapafia with his Best Documentary Oscar for *Amy* in 2016.

Alamy, El Grafico, Getty







Clockwise from above right: Singer Amy Winehouse, as global superstar; and starting out; Formula 1 ace Ayrton Senna on the grid at the 1994 San Marino Grand Prix; Maradona practising to be a DJ.





Maradona film, but passed. Then *Amy* came along and there was something there. I thought, 'This is a really interesting way of making a film about London, and creativity, and the girl-next-door, and what it means to create.' Amy is the odd one out, in a way. She wasn't spiritual like Senna or Maradona. Her belief was in love. She needed love and craved support. If she'd had a sense of faith or spirituality, maybe that would have helped her at times to believe in herself. I always wondered if that could have helped her. I got obsessed with her. I wasn't expecting that. It became a very intense experience. There was a lot of freedom. There was no script, there was no pitch, I just said, 'Give me the music and the publishing and leave us alone.' I found a system of working that I didn't realise I was craving, which is to have more freedom and go where the story takes me, which is very difficult to do with feature films.

3 DIEGO MARADONA (2019)

"When it came along again, Maradona had been in my life a long time. And I didn't want to do a film about football. He's bigger than most footballers; he's more complex, he's edgier, he's gonna be difficult. The reasons not to do it were huge, but I thought, 'Well, that's a reason *to* do it.' And if this was going to be a trilogy, the rule of thirds is that you do it once, you do it again, and then it has to be different. So he's alive, he's older, he's had kids. And I could interview him. I got ten hours with Diego Maradona. We picked and chose quite carefully what we have in the film, but having that time meant I could talk to people around him, and his family, and I would know the stories. That was a really key part of trying to make the most honest film that we could. Part of the journey to make the film was that he had become a slightly joke-like figure. It's the same way people used to laugh at Amy. But the more you find out about these characters, the less funny it is. They're in trouble, actually. It's someone crying out for help. I'm a feature filmmaker, and I like genre films. So *Senna* is an all-out spiritual action-hero film. *Amy* is a love story in a way, but it's also a musical. The songs are key. *Diego Maradona* is a gangster film. Beneath it all is the idea of a street guy who rises up to the top and ends up back on the street somehow."

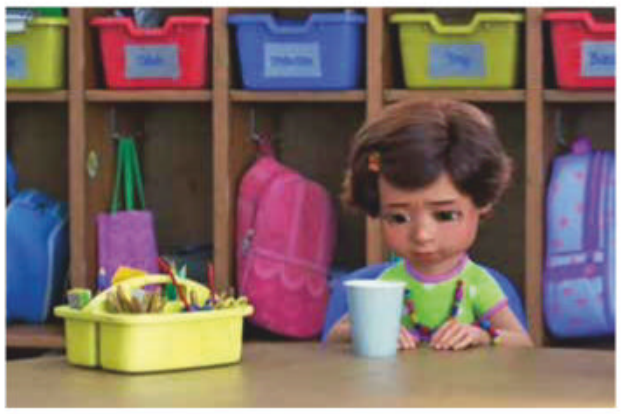
CHRIS HEWITT

***DIEGO MARADONA* IS OUT NOW ON DVD,**





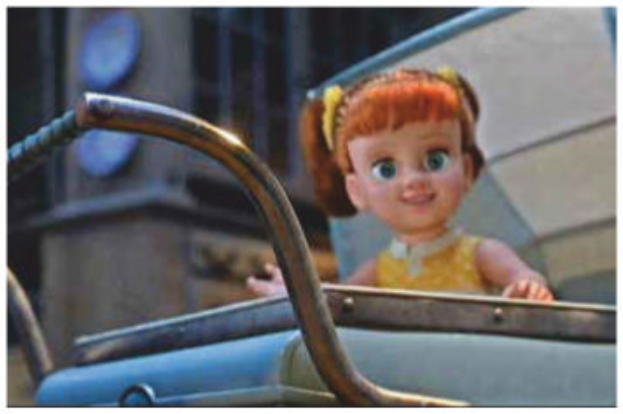












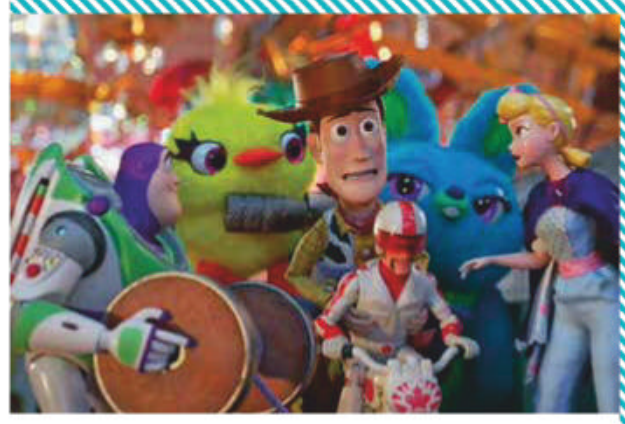


! SPOILER WARNING

THE VIEWING GUIDE

A deep dive into the must-see moments from the month's big release





Toy Story 4

FOLLOWING THE BASICALLY perfect *Toy Story* trilogy was, for director Josh Cooley, "terrifying". He had so much to lose and little to gain by dipping back into the toy box. But, miraculously, in *Toy Story 4* he created a new instalment that extended the journey of Buzz and Woody in a totally new direction. As Woody rediscovers his long-lost love, Bo Peep, he learns that there is life beyond simply being a child's plaything. Cooley explains how he tackled a near-impossible task.

ONCE UPON A TIME

Working out where to begin was one of the biggest decisions of the production. Cooley and his team went through several iterations before deciding to start with the day Bo left Andy's toys. "We had versions where we started way back in time in Andy's room," says Cooley. "There were versions where we had Woody remembering Bo Peep. The problem there was we weren't sure if people would remember her from 20 years ago, so it felt strongest to start the story showing she's really important to the toys and Woody especially."

COWBOY MEETS SHEEPGIRL

With the movie centred on Woody and Bo's relationship, Cooley had to cement a romance that was given little screen time in previous films. "We put together all Bo's scenes from the other films. My memory was that it was mostly just flirting, but it was actually a bit deeper. There are times in the first two movies where whenever Woody is feeling insecure or unsure, he'll go to Bo Peep. She's strong from the beginning, so we saw we could build on that." Inspiration for their relationship came from *Casablanca*, *Raiders Of The Lost Ark* and *Romancing The Stone*, "movies where the male and female character are on the same level".

FACE TIME

Every Pixar film makes technological advances. While you probably noticed the stunning use of light, or even things like raindrops that were scaled up by 500 per cent to work in toy close-ups, the biggest advance in this movie was more subtle. "On every *Toy Story* movie we update the toy designs," says Cooley. "In this film we get really close up to the toys, so the detail on their faces had to be perfect and we had to be able to read the emotions on their face. The trick, as ever, is between looking real enough and too real."

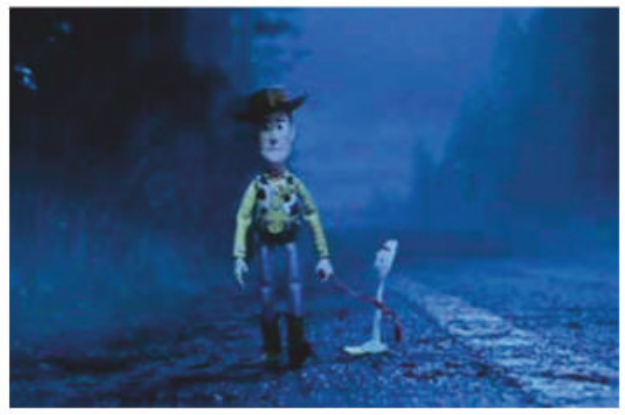
COMEDIANS IN CLOSETS GETTING DUSTY

When Woody is thrown into Bonnie's closet, he encounters four toys voiced by Mel Brooks, Carol Burnett, Betty White and Carl Reiner. "I can't believe we made that happen," says Cooley. "It was important to show that forgetting a toy doesn't mean you hate that toy... We wanted to show Woody is part of a new group of toys that have had their time... I thought of that scene in *Sunset Boulevard* where Gloria Swanson is with all the retired silent film















stars. I wanted to get classic comedians to do the voices." One toy, Betty White's Bitey White, is based on a character from an early draft of the first *Toy Story*. "I remembered seeing [sketches of] this tiger teething ring and thinking it was such a funny idea. It was a toy that had seen some dark stuff. It told stories like Quint from *Jaws*. So when I had the opportunity, I brought that back as an in-joke for us."

ON THE ROAD

One of the movie's most important scenes has Woody and Forky, a sentient spork, lost and walking down a road together. Woody explains to naive Forky what it means to be a toy, laying out the joy and sadness it brings. "That was the first scene we animated with Forky," says Cooley. "Initially, the animator had animated Forky so beautifully. It was too beautiful. He looked like the other toys. We had to make him crappier, make it look like a kid is puppeting him across a table — stiff and awkward."

IN WITH THE 'NU

Duke Kaboom, a 1970s action toy, has very little screen-time but big impact, largely thanks to being voiced by Keanu Reeves. "So much of Duke came from him," says Cooley. "We had a meeting in the Pixar lunch room and he was like, 'He's an action figure, right?' And then he just started launching into all these karate moves — 'Hoo! Ha!' — and standing on the table. He really got into it."

MIRROR MIRROR

Gaby Gaby is in some sense the film's villain, but she's one driven by a need to feel loved. "I love that character," says Cooley. "Originally, she was a pure villain. She wanted a voice box by any means necessary. Then we realised she doesn't need to be villainous... We treat her scary at first and then slowly peel back the onion... When she eventually tells Woody, 'I just want to be loved by a kid,' it's everything he's been feeling. In that scene we even have Woody in the light and her in the dark, then coming into the light as they get on the same page. She's Woody looking into a mirror."

PUTTING AWAY CHILDISH THINGS

The ending does the seemingly unconscionable: it separates Buzz and Woody, as Woody chooses a new life with Bo. It was not always so. "Originally, everyone went back to Andy's room," says Cooley. "It wasn't satisfying at all, so we thought, 'What if we do a *Casablanca* thing and they don't end up together?' That wasn't satisfying either. So we decided to go all the way and send Bo and Woody off on their own adventure. Pitching that, I felt it in my chest. I knew that it was right."

KNIFEY

The final pay-off is given not to Woody but Forky, when Bonnie makes a new toy, modelled on a plastic knife, and brings her home. "Everything Woody said to Forky, he's now saying it to her," says Cooley. "It was really fun to have her say, 'Why am I alive?' — which is the question we're all asking in real life — and have him reply, 'I don't know.' We end the entire *Toy Story* saga on, 'I don't know.'"

OLLY RICHARDS

***TOY STORY 4* IS OUT NOW ON DVD, BLU-RAY AND DOWNLOAD**

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THE STORY OF THE SHOT

How iconic images came to life

Schindler's List

SCHINDLER'S LIST'S girl in the red coat is Steven Spielberg at his most powerful: as German industrialist Oskar Schindler (Liam Neeson) and his mistress Ingrid (Béatrice Macola) survey the liquidation of the Krakow ghetto from a hill on horseback, a girl (Oliwia Dabrowska) in a bright red coat walks blithely through the carnage, ignored by the Nazi soldiers and seemingly oblivious to the violence around her. It's the film's master image, a grace-note of colour in a black-and-white film, a moment of light in a world of darkness.

Spielberg's decision to make *Schindler's List* in black-and-white became a battle. Universal chairman Tom Pollock implored the filmmaker to shoot his three-hour dive into Holocaust history on colour negative stock so a colour version could be made for the then lucrative home video market. Yet Spielberg refused. "I don't know the Holocaust in colour," he explained on the film's 25th anniversary. "Anyone who has seen any documentaries, they are all shot in black-and-white." Yet he knew a splash of colour amidst the monochrome could work wonders.

Rather than created in Spielberg's fevered imagination, the girl in the red coat was ripped from Thomas Keneally's source novel.

The actual girl was Gittel Chill — known as Red Genia due to her love of her coloured coat — who was left with her Uncle Idek, the Krakow Ghetto doctor, while her parents fled to the countryside (they were later killed). Safer in the Ghetto, Genia gained a reputation for evading the Nazis until she was discovered and exterminated on 13 March 1943 — the day Schindler spotted her.

To play Red Genia, Spielberg chose Oliwia Dabrowska, a then three-year-old Krakow resident whose mother responded to an advert looking for a "a small girl with blonde hair". Taken to the audition by her grandfather, Dabrowksa remembered talking to Spielberg "about my home, about dogs, and about *E.T.*" The scene was shot on Szeroka Street in Krakow in Spring 1993, with the film's technical advisor, Franciszek Palowski, observing that Oliwia "rebelled and cried, 'I want my mama,' but she quietened down in the arms of Steven." The next day Palowski reported Spielberg had a double standing by just in case.

Above: Oliwia Dabrowska as the iconic girl in the red coat.

The girl in the red coat is often cited as the turning point for Schindler's change of heart, a pricking of his conscience, but for Spielberg, the moment stands for something else. "She was wearing the brightest colour and she wasn't being seen," he recalled last year. "To me that meant Roosevelt, Eisenhower and probably Stalin and Churchill knew about the Holocaust and did nothing to stop it. For me it was a glaring red flag that anybody — if they had been watching — could have seen." Some things are, it seems, just black-and-white. **IAN FREER**

***SCHINDLER'S LIST* IS OUT NOW ON DVD, BLU-RAY AND DOWNLOAD**

INSTANT TRIVIA

1

ILM created the effect of Genia's coat — shot in colour, the scenes were desaturated to black-and-white, digital rotoscoping keeping the red in the coat.

2

Many people feel the scene chimes with their experience: painter and Holocaust survivor Roma Ligocka's autobiography is titled *The Girl In The Red Coat*.

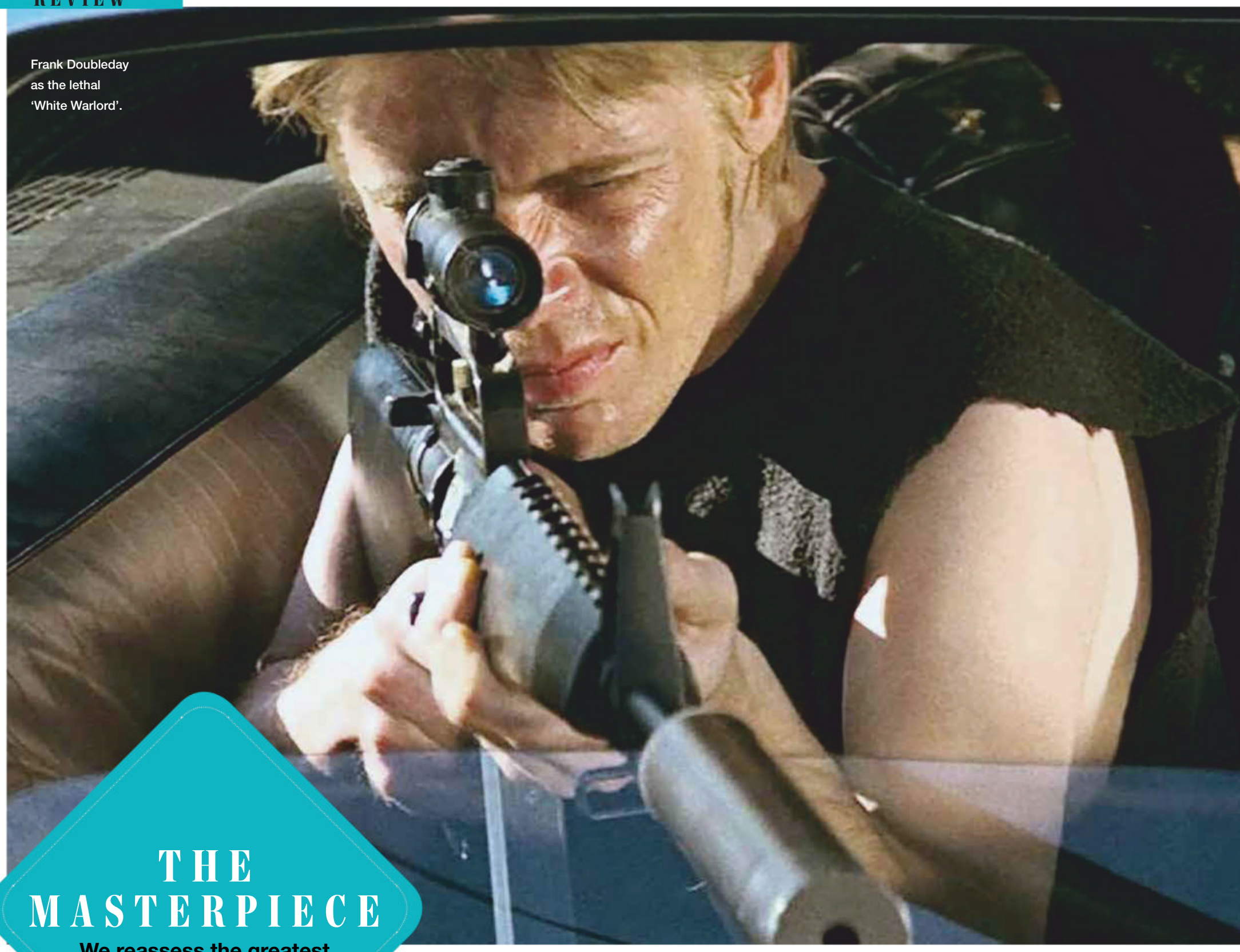
3

The music playing over this scene is *Oyfn Pripetshik*, a popular Yiddish folk song.

4

Against Spielberg's advice, Oliwia Dabrowska watched the film aged 11. She felt it was "too horrible", but trying it again at 18, she realised she had been "part of something I could be proud of".

Alamy



Frank Doubleday as the lethal 'White Warlord'.

THE MASTERPIECE

We reassess the greatest films of all time, one film at a time

Assault On Precinct 13

IT'S LIEUTENANT ETHAN Bishop's first day on the job. He's been reassigned to supervise the Anderson precinct, even though they're closing it down and there's nothing left to do there but stare at the packing crates. His superior Captain Collins asks him, "You want to be a hero your first night out?" Bishop does. Collins counters: "There are no heroes anymore, just men who follow orders." During one night of ultra-violence, Bishop proves him wrong.

Assault On Precinct 13 is John Carpenter's second feature-length film, which he wrote, directed, scored, and edited himself. It's a claustrophobic pulp thriller and modern Western that blends *Rio Bravo*, *Night Of The Living Dead* and exploitation films with hints of home-invasion horror and a heavy dose of paranoia. For the film's doomy, catchy score, Carpenter riffed on Led Zeppelin's 'The Immigrant Song' and Lalo Schifrin's *Dirty Harry* theme, composing and recording it in just three days. College friends and unknowns comprised most of the cast and crew, who made the film in under 20 days and for only $100,000. Despite its low budget and a gruelling shoot, Carpenter had complete creative control and cites *Assault*'s production as his most fun ever making a movie.

The film wasn't without controversy. It depicted a gang member murdering a little girl named Kathy (Kim Richards) in cold blood, which almost garnered the film an X rating. In hindsight, Carpenter regrets the scene, but it's essential to the story and its stakes, showing the amorality of the antagonists. The MPAA insisted he cut it, so Carpenter excised the scene — but only in the print he sent to the MPAA. In prints sent to distributors, however, the scene remained. It was treated as a bloody exploitation film in America where it "wasn't particularly well-received", according to Carpenter, but when he showed it at the British Film Institute, "It got rather good reviews, and luckily for me began my career."

In the opening scene, the police unleash a hail of bullets on unsuspecting members of a gang called Street Thunder. This single act of violence incites Street Thunder's retaliatory sadism and sets off a terrible chain reaction. The LAPD deceives the press, falsely describing the event that killed these six gang members as a "shootout" and the remaining members swear a blood oath of vengeance. Little Kathy becomes a casualty of this war between cop and criminal, and her father guns down the delinquent who killed her. Now hunted by Street Thunder, the father flees to the nearest police station for sanctuary: the Anderson precinct.

For Bishop (Austin Stoker), what should be a boring job goes awry right away. Phones and electricity are cut off. A bus full of dangerous convicts makes a pit stop at the station, including Napoleon Wilson (Darwin Joston) and Wells





Top left: Austin Stoker's newly promoted CHP officer, Ethan Bishop, with prisoner Napoleon Wilson (Darwin Joston). **Left:** James Johnson, Doubleday, Al Nakauchi and Gilbert De la Pena, aka the members of Street Thunder. **Below:** Director John Carpenter.

(Tony Burton). South Central Los Angeles has been transformed into a ghost town, isolating them further. These characters have nothing in common except that they're in the wrong place at the wrong time. Wilson, Bishop and secretary Leigh (Laurie Zimmer) form an unlikely team defending their Alamo against a faceless, shadowy evil. Napoleon Wilson is Carpenter's classic leading man: a proto-Snake Plissken, an archetype inspired by Carpenter's best friend growing up and Carpenter's alter ego, giving voice to the filmmaker's own issues with authority and the status quo. Wilson's dialogue is terse, pulp poetry, and he delivers some of the film's best lines, like, "First time I ever saw a preacher, he said to me, 'Son, there's something strange about you. You got something to do with death,'" and, "In my situation, days are like women — each one's so damn precious, but they all end up leaving you."

Wilson's persistent request for a smoke — a nod to the cigarette gags of Howard Hawks' movies — becomes a litmus test of the kindness of those around him. He's denied cruelly every time — until he meets Lieutenant Bishop and Leigh. Bishop saves Wilson's life twice, and for all his toughness and bravado, Wilson is touched and saves Bishop's life in turn. The friendship forged between these two men is the heart of the story. Once they've survived the siege, Bishop does not allow Wilson to be shackled by another officer, insisting that the men walk out of the station together, as heroes and as equals.

And there's chemistry between Wilson and Leigh, a character modelled after the Hawksian woman: resilient, tough-talking, cool under pressure, more than just a prop or a plot point in a man's story. She's a B-movie Lauren Bacall. If Carpenter's admiration for Howard Hawks was unclear, in one scene he illuminates Leigh with light slanting in through venetian blinds, an homage to Hawks' *To Have And Have Not*.

Carpenter established himself as a subversive filmmaker with *Assault On Precinct 13*, depicting a city suffering the consequences of police brutality, with most of the film's cops as ruthless and menacing as its criminals. Violence here feels senseless, the product of a chaotic, hostile universe. The protagonists stand against it, and their shared crisis serves as a crucible: it reveals their decency and honour, uniting them against a common enemy, joined by their courage and mutual admiration. They protect the little girl's father without knowing who he is or what he's done, no matter the cost. It's the tension at the heart of so many Westerns: an attempt to maintain civilisation in a figurative or literal wilderness. In the face of savagery, they hold on to their humanity.

The Anderson Alamo's last stand against an onslaught offers a glimmer of hope in what might otherwise feel like a nihilistic film. Bishop, Leigh and Wilson navigate this nightmare in the dark, outgunned and outmanned, and they prevail. Carpenter once explained his career-long attraction to siege stories: "... maybe it has some life truths for us all, that we're all under siege in our own way, and it's our job to survive the night."

PRISCILLA PAGE

***ASSAULT ON PRECINCT 13* IS OUT NOW ON DVD, BLU-RAY AND DOWNLOAD**



Alamy, Moviestore Collection, Shutterstock

JOHN CARPENTER BY NUMBERS

THE NEED-TO-KNOW ON THE HORROR MASTER

6/1/48 **BORN IN CARTHAGE, NEW YORK**

18 **THEATRICALLY RELEASED FILMS HE'S MADE**

21 **FILMS HE'S MADE IN TOTAL INCLUDING TV MOVIES**



5 **FILMS HE'S MADE WITH KURT RUSSELL *(ELVIS, ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK, THE THING, BIG TROUBLE IN LITTLE CHINA, ESCAPE FROM L.A.)***

EMS VCS 3

THE SYNTHESISER UPON WHICH CARPENTER COMPOSED THE SCORE FOR HIS FIRST FILM, *DARK STAR*

47 MILLION

THE AMOUNT OF DOLLARS, MADE BY *HALLOWEEN* (1978), HIS BIGGEST HIT. NOT ADJUSTED FOR INFLATION

9 **THE ACTUAL NUMBER OF THE PRECINCT IN *ASSAULT ON PRECINCT 13***



THE RANKING

Four *Empire* writers. Ten movies. Ordered definitively.

Keanu Reeves movies

Chris: When did we first meet Keanu Reeves?
Beth: A VHS of *Much Ado About Nothing*. I would go so far as to say that this was an early crush for old Beth Webb. Nothing says lust like Keanu Reeves in leather trousers.
Chris: You've come in talking like a Cornish fisherman.
Beth: My dad was hoping to get me onto the harder stuff early on, but my mum swept in with *Much Ado* and I've been in love ever since.
Chris: There's an argument to be made that in *Much Ado* he's the handsomest man ever.
Amon: He's not even the most handsome man in that movie. Denzel Washington is in that movie.
Chris: I thought you were talking about Robert Sean Leonard.
Helen: Everybody looks their best in that movie. Everybody looks so freaking hot.
Chris: You can't see what's going on because there's so much steam.
Helen: I don't think that's peak Keanu hotness.
Chris: We're here to discuss the man's work, but fuck it.
Beth: We've gone in with the thirst.
Chris: What's peak Keanu Hotness?
Helen: It's a difficult question. I've drawn up charts. I was introduced to Keanu in the mid '90s or early '90s. I think it was *Excellent Adventure* I saw first, then *Point Break*. That's a one-two knockout punch. *Excellent Adventure* has peak hair.
Chris: That's wrong.
Helen: And *Point Break* is everything. But there's an argument that he's at his hottest in *Speed*.
Chris: With the buzz cut.
Amon: *Speed* is a good shout. *Something's Gotta Give*? That's the movie where Diane Keaton picks Jack Nicholson over Keanu.
Helen: Come on.
Amon: I was really enjoying the movie up until that point, but come on now.
Chris: Now we've objectified Keanu sufficiently, Amon — when did you first get introduced to Keanu?
Amon: *The Matrix* was my first Keanu.
Helen: I remember that almost as a comeback. It felt like he'd been away for a year or two, then *The Matrix* happened.
Chris: I was first introduced to Keanu when I started reading *Empire* in 1989. Back then he

OUR CRITICS



CHRIS HEWITT
Before moving here, thought the English speak like Keanu in *Bram Stoker's Dracula*.



HELEN O'HARA
"Lifelong Keanu apologist". But even she draws the line at *Johnny Mnemonic*.



BETH WEBB
Rates Keanu as an actor. Also loves him in *Toy Story 4* — as a hunk of plastic.



AMON WARMANN
So nice, he can even find good things to say about *The Matrix Revolutions*.



was a young actor very much on the rise. He was on the cusp of *Point Break* and *Bill & Ted's Bogus Journey* and *My Own Private Idaho*, which all came out in 1991. But even then he was a bit of a punchline.

Helen: "Cool breeze between the ears."

Chris: Which is a real shame. The joke was basically he's so pretty, but he can't act. I don't think that's true, but what about you guys? Do you think Keanu Reeves is a good actor?

Beth: I do. We need to be kinder to Keanu. I think there's a lot going on behind there. Still waters run deep.

Helen: He's clearly a guy who's curious, interested and intelligent. I think he's good at identifying what he can do well. He's made five or six world-beating, genre-defining films, and nobody does that by accident. Most actors are lucky to do one or two, but to have a *Speed*, a *Matrix*, a *Bill & Ted*, a *Point Break* and a *John Wick*, that's extraordinary.

Amon: There are more talented actors, obviously. There are few who are as good at using the abilities they have to maximum effect.

Beth: He knows what his currency is. As an action hero he's no Bruce Willis or Jean-Claude Van Damme. He's not a macho action hero, he's a vulnerable and an intelligent one, and calm under pressure. He's a tortured soul. You want to look after him a little bit as well.

Amon: Protect Keanu at all costs.

Helen: These are not the choices of a guy who has no brain.

Chris: Helen is right. He has to my mind six iconic roles. One would have been an absolute iconic role had the movie hit at the time. It's been rediscovered since, and that movie is *Constantine*. He's not anyone's idea of John Constantine. But that movie is tremendous.

Helen: It's amazing how many of those characters are called John.

Chris: It's a very easy name to remember.

Beth: Leave him alone!

Chris: I'm allowed one!

Helen: Isn't it interesting that someone with one of the most interesting names in Hollywood has made his career playing people with the most boring names? And they say he has no talent.

Chris: A lot of his roles are action roles. Technically, all the John Wick films qualify as part of the 'geriaction' genre, where older movie stars are doing their thang. Keanu's now 55, I believe. He doesn't look it.

Amon: I would like some of the vampire juice that he's clearly sipping.

Beth: I want to see more Dad Keanu. He's a dad in the new *Bill & Ted*, but we haven't seen him as father Reeves much.

Helen: I also think he doesn't get enough credit for being a fan and a movie nerd. He made a documentary about digital film versus filmmaking. He directed *Man Of Tai Chi* because he's so into martial arts ever since *The Matrix*. These are not the actions of somebody who comes in for a big pay cheque.

Chris: *John Wick* wasn't a big pay cheque. The first one struggled; it was only word-of-mouth that kept it going. Now it's a phenomenon. There may be someone in this room who's more excited for *John Wick: Chapter 4* than they are for *The Matrix 4*.

Amon: I'm excited about *Matrix 4*, but *John Wick 4*? Give me that movie now.

Helen: In my eyes.

Beth: No way.

Amon: Really?

Beth: *John Wick 2* is the greatest of the franchise. *John Wick 2* is the sweet spot. You get to step into the world. John Wick's not even the best thing in the second film. Then with the third film it started to take itself a little too seriously for my liking. They need to make it more camp for the fourth.

Amon: The first 30 minutes of *John Wick: Chapter 3*, if that was the film, would be my favourite movie of the year.

Chris: It would be short.

Amon: I'd watch it many times.

Chris: Let's talk *Point Break*.

Helen: It's one of my all-time favourite films. It's probably his most quotable film. It's the way Kathryn Bigelow has always played with masculinity and explored it in her films; the same way George Cukor is a great director of women, she's a great director of men. It digs into a lot of action movie tropes and ideas of bro-ness.

Chris: It's a movie that has its meatball sub and eats it in terms of that stuff. It is exploring it, taking the piss a little bit, but also presenting a straight-up action classic.

Beth: The thing I like about him in *Point Break* is that this is a man who's not afraid to be rescued. In the first scene with Lori Petty, she has to save him. Trinity has to save him. Keanu's Ladies, I like to call them. Let Keanu's Ladies do the work.

Helen: He is your unproblematic fave.

Chris: Right, enough squabbling — let's vote!

Illustration: Jacey

THE TOP TEN

1



THE MATRIX (1999)
Amon: "Truly a genre-defining masterpiece, with a rarely cooler Keanu conquering kung fu, bullet time and leather fashion in just two-and-a-half hours. Truly, he *is* The One."

2



SPEED (1994)
Chris: "The best *Die Hard* movie that isn't a *Die Hard*. Bonus Keanu points for skipping the execrable sequel."

3



POINT BREAK (1991)
Helen: "Sports, bromance, and a bit where a guy shoots his gun and goes 'Aaaaah'. What more do you need?!"

4



JOHN WICK: CHAPTER 2 (2017)
Amon: "The franchise's best balance of world-building and action. And Keanu kills two people with a pencil."

5



CONSTANTINE (2005)
Chris: "There's rightly been something of a critical renaissance for this terrific, jet-black comic adaptation."

6



JOHN WICK (2014)
Helen: "The most elegantly plotted *Wick* proved Keanu could still destroy bad guys like they were mere bugs."

7



BILL & TED'S EXCELLENT ADVENTURE (1989)
Beth: "This loveable stoner time-travel caper still holds up 30 years on."

8



MY OWN PRIVATE IDAHO (1991)
Helen: "River Phoenix got the praise, but wouldn't be as good if he weren't playing off Keanu's callow youth."

9



MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING (1993)
Beth: "A rare case of evil Reeves, and it's a mood that fits him as snugly as those leather trousers."

10



BILL & TED'S BOGUS JOURNEY (1991)
Chris: "I much prefer this slicker, smoother and crucially funnier sequel."

AGREE? DISAGREE? WRITE IN AND TELL US AT:
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5 OF THE BEST

Team *Empire* on the month's essential viewing



ONCE UPON A TIME IN HOLLYWOOD

OUT **NOW (DOWNLOAD), 12 DECEMBER (DVD, BLU-RAY)**
CERT **MA15+** / **155 MINS**
DVD BR

A 155-minute slow-burner, Quentin Tarantino's ninth film demands time to digest. And after sitting with it for a while, it should be clear that *Once Upon A Time In...* is easily upper-tier QT. The discourse around the film on release clouded the reality that this is a filmmaker at his most capable, confident, stylish, and surprisingly mature — more *Jackie Brown* than *Kill Bill*. Diverting mid-film into an episode of forgotten '60s Western series *Lancer* is admittedly a lengthy and unnecessary diversion, but for the most part, it's a treat to have Tarantino indulge and luxuriate in a city, a period and a set of characters he clearly loves, with genuine affection. And that love shines through every element of his craft, from performances to production design. *That* ending will always prove divisive, inevitably. But try to imagine a better final shot. We dare you. **JOHN NUGENT**



GAME OF THRONES: SEASON 8

OUT **4 DECEMBER** / CERT **MA15+** / **TBC MINS**
DVD BR

Coming after seven years of near-universal acclaim, *Game Of Thrones*' eighth and final season split more people than Ser Gregor Clegane. With a mere six (albeit long) episodes, the final season saw showrunners (and here writers) David Benioff and D.B. Weiss attempt to tie up every loose strand from George R.R. Martin's mammoth saga without source material to work from. The result is *Thrones* at its most propellant, the story kicked into a gallop for the final furlong, and also its most spectacular, with the third episode — a single, feature-length battle against The Night King — putting any number of movies to shame. If the season falls down, though, it's in the character beats, which are frequently rushed, sometimes clumsy and, in one particular case, downright maddening. No ending to a show of this magnitude was likely to please everyone, though, and *Thrones*' finale, while imperfect, is a satisfying capstone on a television landmark. **JAMES DYER**



APOLLO 11

OUT **4 DECEMBER** / CERT **G** / **93 MINS**
DVD BR

Originally released to coincide with the 50th anniversary of the first moon landing back in July, this stellar documentary offers a new perspective on a historical milestone, turning a half-century-old story we all know into a masterpiece of nail-biting, knuckle-whitening tension. Weaving together hitherto unseen 70mm footage of Apollo 11's eight-day mission, editor/director Todd Douglas Miller places us inside the drama, without recourse to talking heads or narration. Instead he deftly cuts between Messrs Armstrong, Aldrin and Collins going where no man had gone before, the chain-smoking scientists and engineers at Mission Control, with their slide rules and antiquated computers, and a world united in anxiety and awe. From lift-off to splashdown, it's a marvel of endeavour and emotion, a remarkably gripping, urgent, first-hand account, and the year's best thriller. Even Kubrick couldn't have done it any better. Terrific score, too. **MARK SALISBURY**



MOONRISE KINGDOM

OUT **26 DECEMBER** / CERT **PG** / **94 MINS**
BR

These were simpler times: before Brexit, before Trump, before every other buzzword snatching joy from culture, in 2012 Wes Anderson directed a butter-warm coming-of-ager about two teens in love, and it was glorious. Taking inspiration from their own daydreams as young boys, Anderson and his co-writer Roman Coppola penned a script both sharp and sweet, telling the story of two lonely kids stifled by their New England suburbia who find relief in each other. There's balance between the boy, Sam (Jared Gilman), aged 12, an orphan who yearns to leave his life as a scout, and the girl, Suzy (Kara Hayward), also 12, who suffers more from privileged boredom. Anderson amplifies the love story with an ensemble of his usual star players: Edward Norton, Bill Murray, Frances McDormand, Tilda Swinton, Jason Schwartzman. The melting pot here bubbles over with a perfect combination of wit, optimism, youthful compassion and already mature storytelling. **ELLA KEMP**

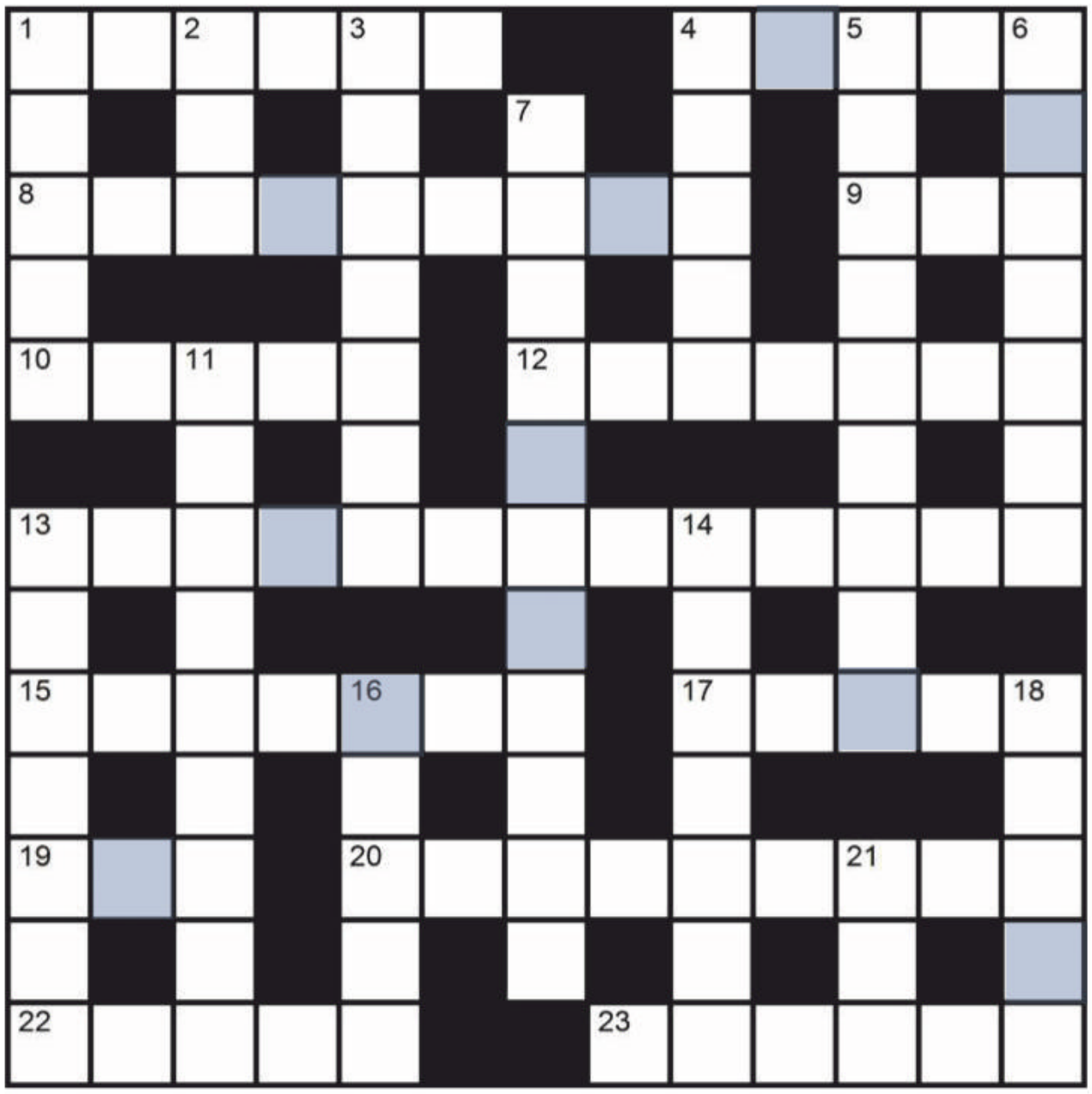


THE EXORCIST III

OUT **NOW** / CERT **M15+** / **105 MINS**
BR

Fifteen years on from the MacNeil case, Lieutenant Kinderman (now a thunderous George C. Scott) is investigating a spate of murders, apparently committed by the long-ago executed Gemini Killer. The anonymous patient on Georgetown General's psych ward may somehow be Gemini, but he may also be Kinderman's old friend Father Damien Karras, who died on those Prospect Street steps in 1973. More Lynchian than Friedkin-ish, director William Peter Blatty's adaptation of his own *Legion* novel has body-shifting (Gemini is played by both Brad Dourif and Jason Miller), tonal lurches and abrupt stumbles into dreamscape surrealism. That unevenness is usually attributed to studio interference: Miller and a clunky climactic exorcism were added in reshoots. The choppy so-called director's cut included here suggests most of the flaws were Blatty's all along, but in either compromised version, *III* remains the best of the *Exorcist* sequels. **OWEN WILLIAMS**

CROSSWORD AND GIVEAWAYS



ACROSS

1 2017 Canadian thriller with Evan Rachel Wood (6)
4 Liv Tyler's *Lord Of The Rings* role (5)
8 He won the Best Director Oscar in 1958 and 1963 (5,4)
9 Brynner, the android gunslinger in *Westworld* (1973) (3)
10 Tony Curtis' 1975 gangster bio (5)
12 George, director of *Shane* and *Giant* (7)
13 She starred with Johnny Depp in *Nick Of Time* (8,5)
15 Kurt, both Elvis and Ego The Living Planet (7)
17/20 Gerard Butler's third go at Mike Banning (5,3,6)
19 Initially the rappers of *Straight Outta Compton* (3)
20 See 17 Across
22 In which Maggie Cheung strived for a drug-free existence (5)
23 This Herman had a *Big Adventure* and a *Big Holiday* (3,3)

DOWN

1 *Victoria &* — (Judi Dench) (5)
2 Ullmann, Oscar-nominated for *The Emigrants* and *Face To Face* (3)
3 As generated by Schwarzenegger and Jim Belushi? (3,4)
4 John Huston directed this 1982 musical (5)
5 Hong Kong-born director responsible for *Maid In Manhattan* etc (5,4)
6 Could be Sophie, could be Isabelle (7)
7 Documentary about jazz legend Chet Baker (4,3,4)
11 Comedian who was Papa in *La Passione* (4,5)
13 Starred Tim Roth as a homecare nurse (7)
14 This Audrey Hepburn starrer's been called: "the best film that Hitchcock never made." (7)
16 Could be Cohn, could be Hawke (5)
18 This Jessica starred in *Tootsie* (5)
21 Hey, it's Jude! (3)

NOVEMBER ANSWERS ACROSS: **7** The Current War, **8** Zee And Co, **9** EDtv, **10** Big Eyes, **12** Spawn, **14** Edney, **16** Goodbye, **19** Bent, **20** Luhrmann, **22** Imitation Game. **DOWN:** **1** Shue, **2** Ice Age, **3** Bridges, **4** Le Cop, **5** Streep, **6** Castaway, **11** In Dreams, **13** Boyhood, **15** Estate, **17** Damage, **18** Alita, **21** Nemo. **ANAGRAM CHEWBACCA**



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CLASSIC
SCENE

Standout sequences from the great movies

Sleuth Chosen by RIAN JOHNSON

RIAN JOHNSON: "There's a scene where Michael Caine and Laurence Olivier are dancing around the fact that Caine is having an affair with Olivier's wife. And they're doing this while playing billiards. It's the most beautifully staged scene, a little bit of perfection with two of the greatest actors in the world."

INT. BILLIARDS ROOM — DAY

Over a game of billiards, Andrew Wyke (Olivier) and Milo Tindle (Caine) are talking about Milo's affair with Wyke's wife. Wyke's mistress, Tea, also comes up.

MILO: Are you going to marry her?

WYKE: Oh no no no, I just want to live with her.

MILO: So, what's stopping you?

WYKE: Basically, the firm of Prurient and Pry Ltd whom you and Marguerite have seen fit to employ. Now, don't look so innocent. Those nicotine-stained private detectives who've been camping outside Tea's flat for the last week.

MILO: It was an insurance policy to keep you from changing your mind about the divorce.

WYKE: How did you know I wasn't having *you* watched?

MILO: Why not? Afraid of what you might find out? Or didn't you think that was possible?

WYKE: Now don't start doing a fertility dance. Of course I knew they'd find you and Marguerite rutting away like crazed weasels. But why should I pay good money to have something confirmed which I've known for months? [*He pots a red*] Black.

MILO: Then if you knew, why didn't you do something about it?

WYKE: Of course, I had to assure myself that you and Marguerite were gonna be a fixture. You see, I want to lose the dear girl for life, not just a two-week Tindelini perm, set and touch-up.

Down goes the black.

MILO: Good shot.

WYKE: Yes it was. Yellow. You see, you don't know her as well as I do. You think you do, but you don't. If you fail her, by which I mean cancelling the account at Harrods or short-changing her on winter to Jamaica, she'll be back to me in a jiffy, mewling for support. And, guilty wife or no, she may be entitled to get it.

He pots the yellow.

WYKE: Green.

MILO: Money isn't everything. And what if she is used to luxury? Whose fault is that?

WYKE: It's not a fault if you can afford it. But can you? Knowing you to be hard up — brown — has she shown any sign of mending her ways in these last idyllic three months? Blue.

Milo just sips his whiskey.

WYKE: When, for instance, did she last turn down a Dom Perignon in favour of, no offence, mind you, the persuasive charms of a dago red? Black.

He stands up, hands on his cue.

WYKE: Now I'm not joking. How much has this brief liaison cost you so far? And that old dad of yours in Soho, when did you last send him any money?

MILO: We have talked about money. Often I've told her we spend too much.

WYKE: She takes no notice.

MILO: No.

WYKE: Silvery laugh. Coquettish turn of the head.

MILO: Something like that.

WYKE: Well, it is to solve this little problem that I've invited you round here tonight. And this, as they say, is where the plot thickens.

MILO: What plot?

Wyke doesn't say anything. Instead, he plays the black ball off three cushions and into the pocket.

EMPIRE

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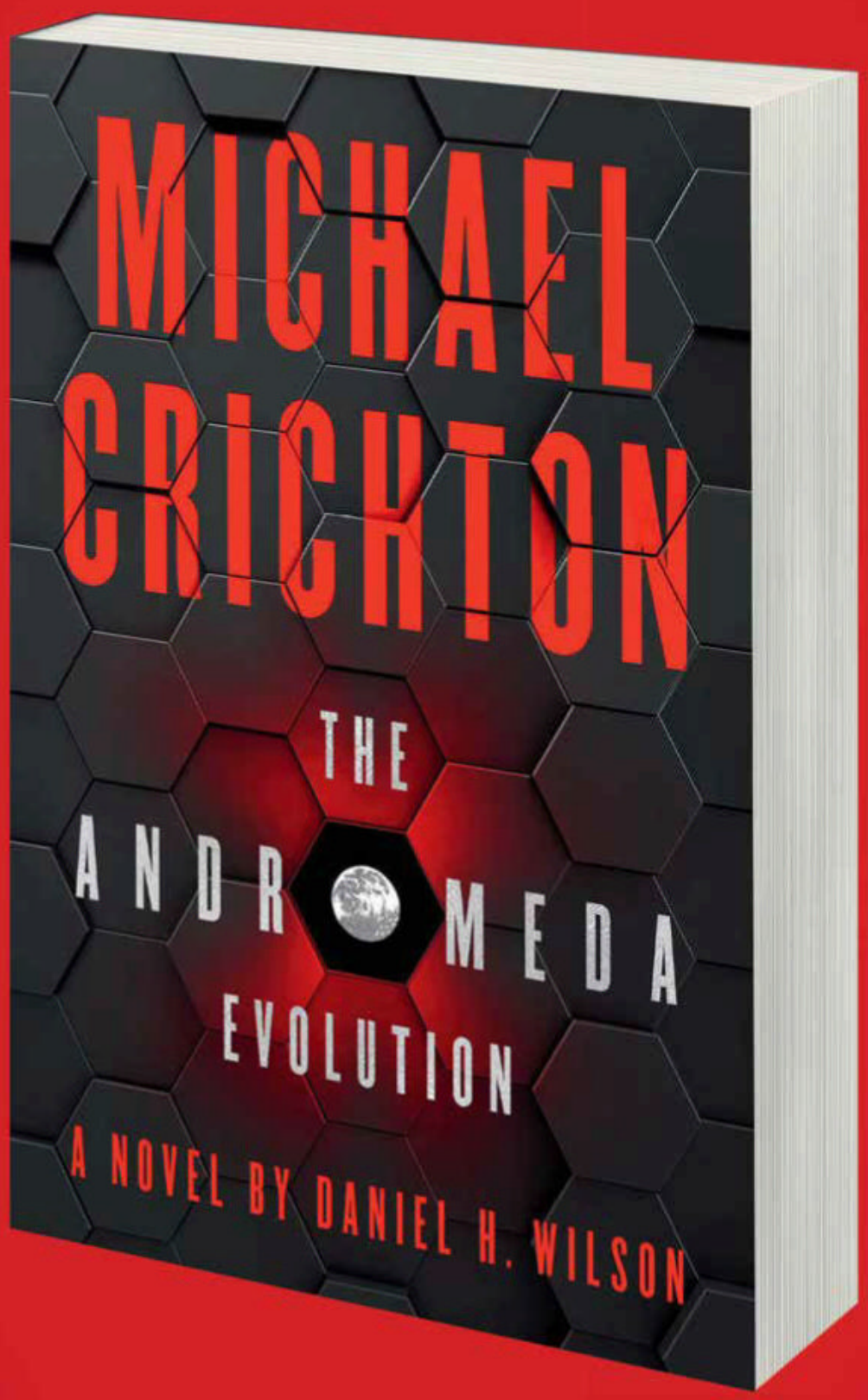
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